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To: Sections and Structures  
From: The Executive Deputy Secretary General (EDSG)  
Date: 17 August 2007

**AI's Policy on Select Aspects of Abortion:  
Updated Explanation of the policy  
for use when communicating the policy**

**Summary**

This document sets out in “user friendly” language an explanation of AI’s policy on selected aspects of abortion in the context of its policy on sexual and reproductive rights. It is updated following the outcomes of the 2007 ICM.

This replaces the version sent on 20 April 2007 (AI Index: POL 39/007/2007).

**Distribution**

Sections/structures are asked to distribute this explanation to board members, directors and to those relevant SRR and communications specialist-activists, volunteers and staff who are drafting communications materials on the policy. Please ensure that you include your section media workers on your distribution list.

**Recommended Actions**

Please ensure that anyone within your section or structure who is leading or representing AI on matters associated with sexual and reproductive rights (SRR) is familiar with this document.

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## ***AI's policy on selected aspects of abortion***

**Amnesty International's policy on sexual and reproductive rights, which includes selected aspects on abortion, was strongly reaffirmed at the organization's International Council Meeting held recently in Mexico. The meeting, which is held every two years, was attended by more than 400 AI delegates from all over the world and of many age groups, faiths, cultures and nationalities. At this meeting, delegates representing the leadership from across the global movement of AI, which has more than 2.2 million supporters, discussed and planned AI's global work to protect and defend human rights including areas such as poverty, impunity, refugees and migrants, the 'war on terror', and violence against women, including sexual and reproductive rights.**

**AI's policy on sexual and reproductive rights, including on selected aspects on abortion, was previously adopted in April 2007. The policy stands without any amendment. AI's policy, decided after extensive internal and external consultation, is driven by the desire to address effectively the consequences of widespread sexual violence targeting women and girls, the failure of virtually all states to prevent sexual violence or provide an adequate remedy for many victims/survivors of sexual violence, and the serious threats that pregnancy can pose to a woman's life and health.**

The need for policy development in the area of sexual and reproductive rights was prompted mainly by AI's campaigning to stop violence against women. The adoption of the policy was preceded by consultation of all AI sections and structures with their members and a number of international meetings aimed at exploring the diversity of views, building better understanding of the issues and establishing consensus.

AI's policy on sexual and reproductive rights seeks to ensure that women and men can exercise their sexual and reproductive rights free from coercion, discrimination and violence. In doing so it responds to the human suffering caused by abuses of these rights.

AI has taken a comprehensive approach to policy development on sexual and reproductive rights issues. The policy covers areas such as sex education, access to sexual and reproductive health information and services including contraception and the promotion of safe motherhood. It also covers AI's long-standing opposition to forms of violence against women and coercive population control measures such as forced sterilization and forced abortion.

The policy enables AI to tackle the grave violations of women's human rights that fall within its mission and strategies. In relation to selected aspects of abortion, the policy enables the organization, where appropriate, to call on states and other relevant actors to:

- Provide women and men with full information on sexual and reproductive health;
- Repeal laws criminalising abortion;

- Ensure that any woman who suffers complications from an abortion will have access to the medical services she needs, whether she obtained the abortions legally or illegally;
- Ensure access to abortion services to any woman who becomes pregnant as the result of rape, sexual assault or incest, or where a pregnancy poses a risk to a woman's life or a grave risk to her health. AI takes no position on whether a woman should have an abortion under any of these circumstances but instead seeks to ensure that abortion services are safe and accessible to these women to prevent grave violations that could result if women were denied this option.

AI will continue to work to enable women to decide for themselves whether and under what circumstances to engage in sexual relations, to prevent unwanted pregnancy and other factors contributing to women's recourse to abortion, but also to support them where they face grave human rights violations as a result of unwanted pregnancy. AI will also support those who defend women's and men's sexual and reproductive rights.

***Background***

Since the launch in 2004 of its global campaign to Stop Violence Against Women, AI has exposed widespread injustices, including multiple forms of sexual violence that can lead to unwanted pregnancies. Many women in these circumstances are doubly stigmatized: first as victims of sexual violence and then for being pregnant. In many countries, women who wish to end unwanted pregnancies resulting from sexual violence have no other option but to resort to unsafe abortions, endangering their lives. For some women, the grim choice is between the risk of an unsafe, illegal abortion and the possibility of imprisonment or being stigmatized for being the victim of sexual violence resulting in a pregnancy.

In many countries, women whose lives are endangered by pregnancy are unable to access legal abortion services. Consequently, women who have had an illegal abortion and face medical complications are unable to access life-saving treatment they need from medical service providers without risking criminal prosecution and imprisonment.

As a human rights organization, AI cannot remain silent in the face of this suffering.

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