

Congressman calls abortion stand 'outrageous'

WASHINGTON - Rep. Chris Smith has called Amnesty International's new position on abortion "outrageous" and said it creates a "major credibility gap" for the widely respected human rights organization.

In a telephone interview with Catholic News Service May 18, the New Jersey Republican said Amnesty's new position makes it "just another pro-abortion organization."

Amnesty's claim that it takes no position on whether abortion should be legalized, when it calls for complete decriminalization of abortion, is "totally contradictory."

"When you decriminalize, you legalize. ... If there is no sanction, there is no law," said the Catholic congressman, one of the leading foes of abortion in Congress and also one of Congress' leading human rights advocates.

In policy papers distributed to members only in April, Amnesty International spelled out a position calling for decriminalization of abortion in all countries. The organization's International Executive Committee adopted the new position at its April meeting in London.

Amnesty said it supports some regulation of abortion, including limits on how late into a pregnancy abortions can be performed. It also said it supports legal access to abortion only in cases of rape or incest or when a woman's life or health is at grave risk.

However, it opposes legislation specifying rape or incest as a condition for obtaining an abortion, arguing that for rape victims "face daunting and sometimes insurmountable challenges" if they must prove rape to get an abortion.

"I'm outraged about their disinformation campaign" on such issues, Smith said.

Smith is chairman of the House Subcommittee on Global Human Rights and International Relations and has authored stronger human rights legislation in

several areas including new laws against child labor, human trafficking, torture and religious discrimination and persecution.

Last November he and more than 70 other House members wrote to Amnesty International urging it not to change its stance on abortion.

At a press conference Nov. 20, he quoted from the letter, "The killing of an unborn child by abortion can never be construed to be a human right. Every child, born or unborn, deserves protection and to have his or her human rights secured and protected."

Smith noted that in one of the pieces circulated among members and meant only for them, Amnesty said it opposes the U.S. Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act recently affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court because of the criminal penalty the law imposes for a doctor who carries out that procedure.

By opposing that law Amnesty is supporting late-term abortions, he said. He said claiming to be advocating human rights by supporting legalized abortion is "the ultimate oxymoron."