

# Scottish cardinal resigns from Amnesty International

LONDON - A Scottish cardinal has announced his resignation from Amnesty International to protest the group's new policy to fight for the decriminalization of abortion around the world.

Cardinal Keith O'Brien of Saint Andrews and Edinburgh said it was with "great sadness" that he quit an organization he joined as a student more than 40 years ago. He said he was no longer able to support the human rights group in good conscience after it voted at a mid-August meeting in Mexico to fight for abortion rights.

"That basic and most fundamental of all human rights, the right to life, is recognized by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the document upon which Amnesty International was founded," Cardinal O'Brien said in an Aug. 28 letter to John Watson, program director of Amnesty in Scotland. "Sadly, now Amnesty International seems to be placing itself at the forefront of a campaign for a universal right to abortion in contravention to that basic right to human life."

He added: "For me it is a matter of conscience that I have decided to resign from Amnesty International. Others must follow their own consciences."

The cardinal suggested the people who objected to the policy transfer their charitable contributions to agencies that supported the "right to life of each and every human being" and to help women who have suffered violence or rape.

Cardinal O'Brien is the latest Catholic leader to leave Amnesty over the abortion policy.

His resignation came a week after English Bishop Michael Evans of East Anglia left the group after 31 years of active membership.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops said in an Aug. 24 statement that it would work closely only with organizations that did not oppose "the fundamental right to life from conception to natural death."

The Amnesty policy was changed by the group's International Council - made up of more than 400 delegates from 75 countries - which approved proposals to abandon the group's neutral policy on abortion as part of its Stop Violence Against Women campaign.

The council voted to "support the decriminalization of abortion, to ensure women have access to health care when complications arise from abortion, and to defend women's access to abortion, within reasonable gestational limits, when their health or human rights are in danger."

Amnesty International was set up in 1961 by the late English lawyer Peter Benenson, a convert to Catholicism, to fight for the release of prisoners of conscience, for fair trials for political prisoners and for an end to torture, ill-treatment, political killings, disappearances and the death penalty.

An Amnesty spokeswoman in London said the group respected the rights of Catholic leaders who felt they could not work with it.

However, she said there were other Catholics who had decided to "continue to support the work of Amnesty."