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Draft letter to IHT

William F. Buckley Jr. has written in your columns of 9 January 1978 that he is resigning from the Advisory Board of Amnesty International USA because of an "announcement by AI that it would henceforward devote its resources to a campaign against capital punishment".

It is with regret that I hear of this decision and with further regret that I feel compelled to state that his views seem to be based upon a number of misconceptions.

Amnesty International works on behalf of persons who have been imprisoned or detained for their beliefs, colour, ethnic origin, religion or language and who have neither used nor advocated violence. These persons are termed "Prisoners of Conscience". Further, and contrary to Mr Buckley's belief that we only work against torture when it is inflicted upon prisoners of conscience themselves, we are committed by our statute to oppose torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in all cases.

In this we follow Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Geneva Conventions. In 1972, at the Annual Council meeting, where representatives of all A.I. National Sections meet, our Statute was amended to commit us to work against the death penalty. This was the result of the expression by the overwhelming majority of the movement that the death penalty is the ultimate form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Mr Buckley's impression that we have only now "come out against capital punishment", is therefore totally wrong.

Mr Buckley asserts that to make a stand against capital punishment has no "nexus" with the proposition that one should not be punished for the non-violent expression of ideas. He also asks why it should be that AI has involved itself in "quarrels over appropriate forms of punishment". Both the assertion and the question miss the point.

We do not seek to argue that there is always a link between our campaigns against cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and our campaigns on behalf of prisoners of conscience. Our platform is simple: Those punishments which are cruel, inhuman or degrading should not be available and that the death penalty with, inter alia, its concomitant physical and psychological cruelty should therefore, be outlawed.

It should also be pointed out that the death penalty is not the only lawfully prescribed punishment that AI opposes as amounting to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. It also opposes, for example, the amputation of the hands of convicted thieves in muslim countries

It is not accurate to see our position as a "triumph of ideology over compassion". It may be that it reflects an ideology which some are unwilling to espouse; it may be that certain individuals who are tortured or sentenced to death are not, because of the very nature of their crimes,

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persons for whom some will automatically feel compassion. But this is not our concern and it is therefore irrelevant to us that the "objects of the compassion of AI ... include the Black September or Japanese Red Army members sentenced to death". We would not ^{only} appeal on behalf of such persons if they were sentenced to death but would also and do appeal to , for example, the Soviet or Chinese authorities ~~themselves to~~ refrain from executions. *in the same way that we would work for a convicted murderer under sentence of death in the USA.*

Opposition to the death penalty has been one of the declared aims of this organization for so long that uninformed criticism of this nature can in no way change our course. It is regrettable to lose the support of one so prominent. It is perhaps even more regrettable that a person who has been on the Advisory Board of AIUSA since should never have read our Statute.

Yours sincerely