



**Media Release  
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**Bishops urge Catholics to explore new paths for defending human rights**

The Catholic Bishops of Australia today said that by imposing a new policy in favour of abortion, Amnesty International had taken a tragic turn and effectively created a human rights organisation which excluded Catholic members.

The President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Archbishop Philip Wilson, said that the Bishops were deeply saddened by Amnesty's shift away from a neutral stance on abortion.

"And it is with much regret that we are now in a position of having to advise that because of this change in policy, membership of Amnesty International is no longer compatible with Catholic teaching and belief on this important point," Archbishop Wilson said.

Archbishop Wilson repeated his recent statement that Catholic people have had a long association with Amnesty International, going right back to its inception, and the two bodies have been closely aligned in their commitment to social justice.

"However Amnesty International has now adopted a position which goes against the Catholic understanding of the dignity of the human person and the sacredness of life," he said.

"This has been a great sadness for the many Catholic people, including hundreds of Australian Catholic school students, who have been members of Amnesty International.

"Some of these groups and individuals have already severed ties with Amnesty International.

"After due consideration, we now also urge Catholics, and all people who believe in the dignity of the human person from natural conception until natural death, to seek other avenues of defending human rights."

Archbishop Wilson said that one such avenue endorsed by the Bishops was a new organisation being formed by the staff and students of St Aloysius College in Sydney following their split with Amnesty International.

The new organisation is to be named the Benenson Society, after Peter Benenson, the Catholic lawyer who founded Amnesty International.

The new society will be open to all and will allow school groups and individuals to continue to be involved in fighting injustice, ending human rights abuses and standing in solidarity with the imprisoned and the oppressed.

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