

Amnesty International Adopts Gay And Lesbian Prisoners Of Conscience

YOKOHAMA JAPAN-In a first step forward on the issue, Amnesty International (AI) on September 7 passed a resolution saying it would include those imprisoned for being Gay or Lesbian as prisoners of conscience. The move came during its biennial convention and only as the result of a compromise which took some of the luster off of the hard-won victory.

AI, founded in 1961 and based in London, is probably the world's best known human rights organization and regularly issues highly publicized reports on human rights conditions around the globe.

The new provision has been pushed mostly by European and North American delegations. The resolution which finally passed was sponsored by the US chapter. But the determined opposition of AI sections in South America, Africa and Asia forced a compromise which leaves Gay and Lesbian rights supporters worried.

The compromise includes a so-called escape hatch which allows individual national sections, as chapters are called, to interpret the resolution in the context of "cultural background." Supporters are worried that this will allow sections in nations which need

the protection most to ignore the resolution. The compromise also included language which said that the resolution was passed "realizing fully that this decision increases the difficulty of the development of our movement in many parts of the world." No similar language has been used when other categories have been added.

Supporters are hopeful that the new resolution will begin a process of inclusion and will begin to publicize the horrendous treatment of Gays and Lesbians in many parts of the world.

Missouri Will No Longer Isolate HIVers

JEFFERSON CITY-Missouri's Department of Corrections says it is ending its policy of isolating prisoners who are HIV positive. Beginning this month, 95 male inmates will be moved into the general prison population.

The men have been housed in a unit at the Jefferson City Correctional Center, formerly the Missouri State Penitentiary, a maximum security facility. Three female inmates

also test HIV positive, but women have never been isolated in Missouri prisons.

Missouri will no longer be one of only three to five states that continues to segregate HIV positive prisoners. The state is also about to lose a Federal class action suit that charges the policy denies HIV positive inmates access to educational and recreational programs that other inmates get, according to prison officials.

Deputy Director Gail Hughes said the policy does not insure the general prison population is free of the virus, promoting a false sense of security for inmates and staff, another official said. Prisoners are tested for HIV when admitted to the prison, but the tests cannot detect infection during a latency period of several weeks, possibly months.