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To the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee regarding the *Abortion Law Reform Amendment Bill 2016*

Amnesty International's QLD & Northern NSW branch is pleased to make a submission in favour of the amendments in this bill on behalf of our 78,000+ supporters in QLD.

Australia ratified the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1983, thereby committing to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women both in law and in practice. In order to uphold international human rights standards and prevent the discrimination of women, all states must align their laws. This includes decriminalising medical procedures needed only by women and girls.

Amnesty International supports removing sections 224, 225, 226, and 282 of the Criminal Code and we request that abortion instead be regulated under health legislation as it is in other jurisdictions, such as the Australian Capital Territory.

Unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions are a major public health concern and are a key cause of preventable maternal illness and death. Amnesty International believes that women and men should be able to exercise their sexual and reproductive health rights free from coercion, discrimination and violence.

Amnesty International is greatly concerned about the *indirect* impacts of the criminalisation of abortion. These often include:

- Women being deterred from accessing abortion services through the health system, instead feeling compelled to self-procure them outside the health system;
- Stigmatisation which has been found in various contexts to deter women from seeking access to abortion within the health system;
- Women being denied safe abortions even in circumstances where they are legally entitled to abortion access;
- Physicians refraining from providing services for fear of criminal prosecution, either fear for themselves or for their patients;

- A lack of unambiguous, clear information about the law and available services, which may lead women to take matters in their own hands, rather than consulting with physicians; and
- The disproportionate impact of the above issues on specific groups of women, in particular young women, economically disadvantaged or other marginalised groups of women and women in locations where it is difficult or impossible to get access to safe abortion services.

In summary, Amnesty International supports the *Abortion Reform Amendments Bill 2016* and amending the QLD Criminal Code to decriminalise abortion. These changes would be a step toward QLD upholding international human rights standards and ending the current discriminatory laws. It also means we will align with other Australian States and Territories that already have decriminalised abortion.

Kind regards,

Paul Toner
Branch President
Amnesty International QLD & Northern NSW Branch