

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ACT 77/021/2004 (Public)
News Service No: 035
5 March 2004

Embargo Date: 5 March 2004 11:00 GMT

Amnesty International launches global campaign to stop violence against women - A cancer and human rights atrocity

Violence against women is a cancer eating away the core of every society, in every country of the world, Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International, said today at the launch of the organisation's global campaign to stop violence against women.

Whether in times of peace or war, women are subjected to atrocities simply because they are women. Millions of women are beaten, raped, murdered, assaulted, mutilated and even denied the right to ever exist. At least one in three women in the world will suffer serious violence in their lifetime.

Unveiling its worldwide *Stop Violence Against Women Campaign*, Amnesty International called for urgent action by every man and woman to end this outrageous scandal.

"This is not something that just happens over there, it happens here. It is not something that only happens to other people, it happens to you, your friends and your family. Until all of us, men as well as women, say 'no, I will not let this happen', it will not stop," said Irene Khan.

"Violence against women is a human rights atrocity. Human rights are more than sets of laws and obligations, they embody a promise that, in equality, we are all entitled to the same rights. Violence against women is the cavernous rift between that promise and the will of governments, local authorities, religious, business and community leaders to fulfil it."

Amnesty International's report *It's in our hands - Stop Violence against Women* reveals the multiple causes of violence from armed conflict to family violence and harmful traditional practices that seek to control women's sexuality.

"Violence threatens women in multiple forms during conflict. From the female child soldiers who are routinely raped by their own troops and the civilian women and girls who are mutilated, raped and murdered as a weapon of war, to the escalation in violence within the family as troops return home - armed conflict is having a devastating and desperate impact on women that goes far beyond the inherent violence of war."

Also highlighting the global problem of violence in the home and community, Amnesty International points to every country in the world for failing to protect women in their own homes.

"Behind closed doors and in secret, women are subjected to violence by their partners and close relatives, too ashamed and afraid to report it and so seldom taken seriously when they do."

Even where legislation exists to prevent and punish such violence, the authorities routinely fail to implement it and in some areas, parallel systems of authority such as community and religious leaders actually allow it to persist, Amnesty International added.

"From the battlefield to the bedroom, women are at risk," Irene Khan said. "They are the first to feel the lack of poor social services, the first to be denied education and health care. The effects of economic globalization are leaving more and more women trapped in poverty on the margins of society. Poverty leaves women more exposed to violence, less able to escape it. It severely restricts women's ability to organize and fight for change. In this, as in so many other ways, governments are failing to address the real 'terror' of our world that millions of women face every day."

Amnesty International paid tribute to women's organisations around the world for the enormous strides that have been made to counter violence and achieve justice and equality over the last few decades.

"There is much to be optimistic about the future as real solutions to the problem do exist and have been demonstrated to work. We will join with women's organizations to lobby for change," said Irene Khan.

"As a human rights organisation we will mobilise our members and supporters around the world. We will engage men as well as women. Men must play a crucial part if we are to end violence against women."

During the campaign, Amnesty International will:

- Call on all people, men and women, to raise their hands to end violence against women.
- Work for a world in which all cultures, traditions, political and judicial systems regard violence against women as abhorrent.
- Demand accountability and fight impunity for violence against women whether in peace time or during conflict.
- Seek the abolition of laws that discriminate against women, and the enactment and effective implementation of laws and other measures to protect women from violence.
- Hold states individually and collectively accountable under international and domestic laws to prevent, investigate, punish and redress all acts of violence against women whether in peacetime or during conflict.
- Secure effective action to stop violence against women at the community level from local government or religious, traditional and informal authorities.
- Campaign to end impunity for combatants who commit violence against women.

"Violence against women is not normal, legal nor acceptable and should never be tolerated or justified. It can and must be stopped," Irene Khan concluded.

"It is in our hands to make a difference and to bring human rights home."

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>