

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Middle East and North Africa: Campaign launched to stop violence against women**

(Amman) Amnesty International today called on people in the Middle East and North Africa to support its worldwide campaign to Stop Violence Against Women.

The launch in Amman, attended by Her Majesty Queen Rania al-Abdullah, comes at the end of a major seminar that gathered activists to discuss ways to eradicate laws and practices that foster violence against women in the region.

"Violence against woman is a global scandal which also affects women in the Middle East and North Africa," declared Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International, at the regional launch of the campaign in Jordan.

Throughout the world, one in every three women suffers rape, attack or assault at one point in her life.

"In Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Territories and Algeria, women have been the undeclared casualty of violence in armed conflicts. Throughout the region, countless women have also suffered violence in their homes."

"Women are not victims -- although they are victimized. They are agents of change," said Ms Khan.

"Women's organizations from Morocco to Lebanon have been relentlessly working to combat violence perpetrated against women inside or outside the home. Amnesty International's campaign joins this valiant work. Together, we hope to bring an end to this scandal."

Amnesty International's campaign will demand the abolition of laws which discriminate against women and perpetuate violence. It will insist that governments adopt and apply laws effectively to protect women and criminalize rape and other forms of sexual violence. It will campaign to end impunity for violence against women.

According to Amnesty International, as of last year, 54 countries still have laws that actively discriminate against women, 79 countries have no law against domestic violence and 127 countries have

no laws against sexual harassment.

"We are calling on national and local authorities worldwide to assume their responsibilities to eradicate violence against women, no matter where it happens, in the bedroom, backstreet or battlefield. We call on men, as well as women, to join us in this campaign," concluded Ms Khan.

"Violence against women may be universal but it is not inevitable. We can end it," said Ms Khan.

"We must be ready to listen to the voices of women and support them to organize themselves. We must reaffirm the universal right of women to be free of violence, irrespective of culture, custom or tradition. We must have the courage to confront those in authority and demand change."

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