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Spain: Authorities must act effectively now to protect women's rights in the home

59-year-old Teresa, who left her husband after 38 years of insults, beatings and forced sex, is convinced that if she reported him, her situation would get worse...She does not trust public institutions to protect her. At the time of her interview with Amnesty International, she had spent nine months shut in her home with the blinds lowered so that her husband would think she had left the city.

Teresa's story is far from being rare. The number of women killed by their partner or former partner as a result of gender-based violence has continued to increase since 2001, according to official statistics. In 2004, 72 women died at the hands of their partner or former partner. Seven of these women had been granted protection orders.

Survivors of domestic violence face considerable obstacles in getting help, protection, and justice, according to an Amnesty International report. Official statistics show that over 95 per cent of women suffering ill-treatment do not make a complaint. Those who do report such crimes are met with indifference or face insensitive interrogations which discourage them from pursuing their case further.

"The Spanish state has a responsibility to prevent violence, investigate abuses, punish those responsible and compensate the victims, and must do so without delay using all appropriate means," said Maria Naredo, Women's Officer at Amnesty International Spain.

Despite welcoming the drafting of a new law on gender-based violence, Amnesty International is concerned that the onus for setting protection measures in motion will continue to fall on the victims, and comprehensive help will only be available to those who lodge official complaints.

"This law is only a working framework, a starting point for alleviating the obstacles facing women, which women themselves have been pointing out," said Maria Naredo. "The Spanish government must put effective measures in place to make the rights of every woman a reality."

Drawing upon the testimonies of women who have survived violence in the home, the organization found evidence of prejudice and discrimination in the response of public institutions. A particular concern was the lack of protection afforded to women from vulnerable groups, such as undocumented immigrant women, Roma women, disabled women, and women with psychological problems or addictions.

Undocumented immigrant women encounter particular barriers in getting help, despite it being acknowledged that they should receive the same protection as others. In some regions survivors have to be sponsored before they can enter a refuge; in others, they are barred access and are referred instead to general immigrant support centres. To receive financial support, women who have been granted a protection order must be seeking employment -- but undocumented immigrants are unable to do so because of their administrative status.

The UN committee which monitors discrimination against women has alerted the Spanish government to the prevalence of violence against women and the increase in killings. It highlighted the lack of protection for vulnerable groups, including undocumented immigrants, and expressed concern at the lack of coordination between the central government and different regions in the care of victims of violence.

The report makes a number of recommendations to the Spanish government, including:

- Minimum standards for response to gender-based violence throughout the country
- Effective action to bring about early detection of domestic violence, and to provide health care for survivors
- A review and evaluation of existing measures, with the involvement of survivors and women's groups.

To see the report, *More than words -- Spain: Making protection and justice a reality for women victims of gender-based violence in the home* (in Spanish), please go to:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/esleur410052005>

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