

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: EUR 44/021/2004 (Public)
News Service No: 131
2 June 2004

Embargo Date: 2 June 2004 08:00 GMT

Turkey: Violence originating in the family

"Generally, we live in fear. Fear of our fathers, brothers, and husbands. We are frightened because we experience violence from them... From now on, we don't want to be exchanged. We don't want to marry someone whose face we've never seen. We don't want to be made a present of. We don't want to stay uneducated. We don't want to be married as children. We don't want to live in continual fear of being punished for no good reason."

Nebahat Akkoc, founder of KA-MER (Women's Centre), a women's group in Diyarbakir, Turkey, that works against family violence.

Speech at Conference on crimes of so-called "honour", Diyarbakir, September 2003

At least a third and up to a half of all Turkish women are estimated to be victims of physical violence within their families. Like women the world over they are beaten, raped, and in some cases even killed or forced to commit suicide, Amnesty International said today as the organization published its latest report on violence against women.

The report *Turkey: Women confronting family violence* examines the causes behind violence against women in the family; lists cases of individual women who are victims of such violence; identifies the perpetrators; and gives credit to the work of women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

"Violence against women by family members spans the spectrum from depriving women of economic necessities through verbal and psychological violence, to beatings, sexual violence and killings," Amnesty International said.

Some acts of violence involve traditional practices, including so-called "crimes of honour", and forced marriage which includes early marriage. Some women who have apparently committed suicide have in fact been killed or forced to kill themselves by family members.

"The underlying cause of the violence is discrimination that denies women equality with men in every area of life."

"A culture of violence can place women in double jeopardy, both as victims of violence and because they are denied effective access to justice," the organization said.

"Violence against women is widely tolerated and even endorsed by community leaders and at the highest levels of the government and judiciary. The authorities rarely carry out thorough investigations into women's complaints about violent attacks or murders or apparent suicides of women. Courts still reduce the sentences of rapists if they promise to marry their victim, despite recent moves to end the practice."

Amnesty International is concerned that the government has failed to ensure effective implementation of existing legislation and fears that there is the potential that further reforms will also be resisted by the courts and other parts of the criminal justice system.

"The Turkish government has a duty to protect women from violence committed not only by state officials but also by private individuals and groups. Under international human rights law, it must secure women's rights to equality, life, liberty and security, and freedom from discrimination, torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment," the organization said.

Amnesty International calls on the Turkish government to ensure that:

- Women are provided with protective mechanisms such as shelters, judicial mechanisms and appropriate health care, reparation and redress;
- Prosecutors and police investigate and press charges against perpetrators of violence against women;
- There is comprehensive recording and statistical monitoring of incidence of violence against women;
- Laws to protect women are properly enforced;
- Women's rights groups and other NGOs receive support for their work in eradicating discrimination and violence against women.

Background

The report *Turkey: Women confronting family violence* (AI Index EUR 44/013/2004, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur440132004>) is one of a series published as part of Amnesty International's *Stop Violence against Women* campaign, which was launched in March 2004. (See *It's in our hands – Stop violence against women*, March 2004 AI Index: ACT 77/001/2004 <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engact770012004>). The global campaign highlights the failure of countries around the world to prevent, investigate and punish violence against women.

See also *Turkey: End sexual violence against women in custody!*
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGEUR440062003>

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