

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: IOR 41/026/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 084
6 April 2005

2005 UN Commission on human rights: Oral statement under item 12: Violence against women

Amnesty International and the Center for Women's Global Leadership

Mr Chair

Millions of women and girls in every society in the world face discrimination and violence at the hands of the state, the community and the family. It cuts across boundaries of wealth, race and culture. Some women are at particular risk of violence by virtue of a multiplicity of factors including discrimination based not only on gender, but also on race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation or identity, health, age or physical or mental ability. These dimensions of discrimination intersect, forcing many women into situations of multiple marginalization. The nature and extent of this violence is well known to governments present at the Commission. Yet little has been done to impact on it.

Violence against women and girls will not stop unless the underlying cause of discrimination and the impact of violence on other areas of women's lives is fully recognized and addressed. Violence both derives from discrimination and serves to reinforce it. Women's access to, for example, housing, land and economic independence is both affected by the violence women suffer and makes them more susceptible to violence.

Violence is used to restrict women's independence, their freedom of expression and movement, their sexuality and their reproductive choices. Restrictions on sexual self determination have many consequences. For example, in some countries women are criminalized for same sex relationships or consensual heterosexual sexual relationships outside marriage. It also perpetuates racial, religious and sexual stereotypes, including that women, and particularly married women, are always available for sex with or without their consent. Sexuality baiting and violence against women close down opportunities for organizing and advocating for women's rights.

In her report to the 61st session the Special Rapporteur on violence against women highlights the intersections of violence against women and girls and HIV/AIDS, noting that violence not only increases women's risk of HIV infection but being HIV positive also makes them targets for further violence. Women face a number of gender-specific circumstances which increase their risk of HIV infection. They are exposed to sexual violence and coerced sex inside and outside marriage, as well as to traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, early marriage, and wife inheritance. Many women lack information about and access to HIV prevention measures and to healthcare, as well as to support and medication after infection.

At the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, governments reaffirmed the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted by the 4th UN World Conference on Women in 1995. In doing so they committed themselves to advancing women's human rights in many areas.

The commitments to women made in the Beijing Platform for Action must be incorporated into the Millennium Summit and the centrality of women and gender issues into all aspects of UN reform must be recognized. Without gender equality and women's human rights, the Millennium Development Goals and all UN commitments to equality, development and human rights will not be realized.

Thank you, Mr Chair