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Russian Federation: Violence against women must not be ignored

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"Sometimes he would beat me and I don't even know why," Oksana.

"Many more women would turn to the authorities if they would really help us. I called the police 16 times in one night, they did not even come once," Liliana.

Violence against women in the Russian Federation is one of the most pervasive, yet hidden human rights abuses. Recent independent research revealed that 70 per cent of married women had been subjected to one or another form of violence by their husband, Amnesty International said today as it launched its report, *Russian Federation: Nowhere to turn to. Violence against women in the family.*

"Violence against women in the family is not a private matter and there is no justification for it. It is a human rights abuse which states are obliged to act against under international law," said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

Women, victims of violence in the family, testify to their ordeal - regular beatings, marital rape, harassment, stalking, attempted murder - and the difficulties to find protection and support in Amnesty International's report. While women are coming forward to speak about such experiences, many are still afraid to disclose their identities from fear of reprisal from their partners but also because of public ostracism.

Amnesty International is concerned about the high level of acceptance of violence against women in the family in the Russian Federation. There are attempts to explain and excuse such violence - police, judges and often the women themselves name alcohol, poverty or housing problems as "reasons" for violence in the family and many people, including of victims of such violence, fail to recognize it as a punishable crime.

"Violence against women in the family denies women some of their fundamental rights, such as the right to life, to physical and mental integrity, to liberty and security of the person and to freedom of expression. No matter what the personal circumstances of the women are, the state can not deprive them of its protection and has to take effective measures to prevent, protect and punish those, who have subjected women to violence in the family," Nicola Duckworth said.

"It is not enough to make those who commit acts of violence in the family, accountable. The state which tolerates such violence also has to be made accountable."

In some regions and cities the authorities, often following the lobbying of non-governmental organizations, have set up shelters, hotlines and crisis centres for women but there is no adequate systematic approach throughout the Russian Federation, which makes it difficult for women who have become victims of violence in the family to find real protection and support.

However, Amnesty International is concerned about the apparent lack of political will at the federal level to put an end to violence against women in the family. Many support centres and women's organizations are threatened with closure since funds and government support have been withdrawn.

"With about 9 million inhabitants, Moscow is the largest city in the Russian Federation. Yet it does not have a single shelter for victims of violence against women. Even a small shelter would send the right signal; that the authorities are willing to protect women from violence in the family," Nicola Duckworth said.

The Russian Federation is a party to international and regional human rights treaties, all of which require the government to protect, respect and fulfil the human rights of those under its jurisdiction, including women who are victims of violence in the family.

Amnesty International calls on the Russian authorities to create effective judicial and non-judicial mechanisms to stop violence against women in the family. As a first step, the organization calls on the Russian authorities to fully implement the recommendations of the UN Committee for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Background

The report, *Russian Federation: Nowhere to turn to. Violence against women in the family*, (AI Index: EUR 46/056/2005) <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engEUR460562005> is based on research in several regions -- Karelia, St Petersburg, Moscow and Altai -- where Amnesty International found that some positive measures have been taken to improve protection and support mechanisms for victims of violence in the family.

The report is mainly based on research conducted by Amnesty International in December 2004 and early 2005, and is part of Amnesty International's worldwide campaign to Stop Violence Against Women.

Public Document

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