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Russian Federation: Violence against women – time to act!

Joint Public Statement with the Russian Association of Crisis Centres “Stop Violence”

Violence against women is one of the most pervasive, yet hidden of human rights abuses. It is rooted in a global culture of discrimination which denies women their fundamental rights. No political or economic system or culture is exempt when it comes to allowing and justifying violence against women - in USA a woman is raped every six minutes, in Russia about 14,000 women are estimated to be killed in domestic violence annually. This year, more than 15,000 women will be sold into sexual slavery in China.

"Violence against women is a violation of human rights that cannot be justified by any political, religious, or cultural claim."

Figures released by Russian women's non-governmental organizations show how women's right to life and freedom from violence are threatened, on a daily basis, in the home and their right to physical, mental and sexual integrity denied. For example they report that:

Every day 36,000 women in the Russian Federation are beaten by their husbands or partners. Every 40 minutes a woman is killed in domestic violence.

"The number of women dying every year at the hands of their husbands and partners in the Russian Federation is roughly equal to the number of all soldiers who died in the 10-year long war of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan," Natalya Abubikirova, Executive Director of the Russian Association of Crisis Centres said. "We think that violence against women is a problem of national importance. Fifty-three per cent of Russia's population are women and we must not tolerate the indifference with which society and state are treating this problem. Our goal is to change the culture of discrimination against women so that we can improve the situation of women."

Both Russian and international organisations have highlighted the need to address domestic violence in Russia as a priority. At the start of its campaign on human rights in the Russian Federation, Amnesty International called on the Russian authorities to make domestic violence a distinct criminal offence; to introduce training for law enforcement officials; and to recognize and prosecute violence against women, including domestic violence and trafficking of women.

"International standards are clear - violence against women must not be tolerated, and governments have a responsibility to act. The Russian government must cooperate with the Russian

Association of Crisis Centres for Women to establish a strategic and comprehensive program of action to tackle violence against women."

"2003 should be the year when the Russian authorities take concrete steps to protect women and show that domestic violence will not be tolerated," the international human rights organization said.

Action is being taken in some regions of the Russian Federation where members of the Association of Crisis Centres have established cooperation with local government structures. Law enforcement officials in these regions have shown their commitment to deal with domestic violence. Learning from and building on this cooperation shows the way forward - but much more needs to be done by the Federal government.

"Action by the Russian government, in consultation with non-governmental organizations could start with measures to improve collection of police data on violence against women and make it public, and to put into place a training program for law enforcement officials."

Amnesty International's members around the world will show their solidarity with Russian women on 8th March, International Women's Day, for example by holding demonstrations and vigils, and by organizing lectures with representatives of Russian women's organizations to insist on ending domestic violence.

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