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Albania: Protecting women from violence is an obligation, not a choice

*"He would hit me with his hands, slap me, and then use the telephone cable."
"One day he used handcuffs and tied me to the exhaust under the car and then he drove off."
"He beat me so badly that I ended up in the psychiatric hospital for depression."*

Testimonies of women survivors of violence in the family

The Albanian government must live up to its obligations and take immediate measures to protect the lives of thousands of women who suffer from violence at the hands of their husbands or intimate partners, Amnesty International said in a report published today.

The report *Albania - Violence against Women in the Family: "It's not her shame"*, documents violence against women in the family, including being slapped, beaten, kicked, threatened with guns or knives, raped, and in extreme cases, killed. Some women, unable to escape such violence in any other way, may commit suicide or resort to violence themselves. Many more endure psychological violence, physical and economic control. Often such violence is justified by reference to tradition and Albanian 'mentality'.

"We urge the Albanian government to immediately draw up a plan of action that includes protection mechanisms for women who suffer from violence, and to prosecute and punish the perpetrators, including by making domestic violence an offence under the Criminal Code," said Sian Jones, Amnesty International's researcher on Albania.

Women in Albania are brought up to believe they do not have the same rights as men, and that domestic violence is a normal part of marriage. This prevents them from ringing the police for help, which denies them access to justice through the legal system. When women do call the police to report violence, they often find that the police are reluctant to respond to their calls or take appropriate action.

The Albanian authorities fail to recognize the full extent of violence against women in the family, because there is no law criminalizing domestic violence and no statistics for such cases. When cases involving domestic violence are brought to court, they are not recognized and treated as such.

In January 2006, a coalition of Albanian non-governmental organizations submitted a draft law to Parliament designed to prevent violence in the family and protect its victims. If passed, the law would be

crucial in enabling women to seek protection from violent spouses.

"The authorities are in a position to break this no-win situation. They must live up to their obligations under international human rights standards, and should also implement the provisions of the proposed new law on family violence," Sian Jones said. "This should be done through a coordinated response that includes law enforcement and judicial authorities, as well as health care and other professionals who may assist in the prevention of such violence."

Violence against women in the family must not be tolerated, excused and accepted as a normal part of marriage or a "family issue". Amnesty International considers that such violence violates the human rights of women and girls to mental and physical integrity, to liberty and security of the person, to freedom of expression and the right to choice in marriage. Violence may lead to treatment amounting to torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and in extreme cases, may violate the right to life.

For a full copy of the report, please see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur11>

Other relevant Amnesty International reports include:

France: Violence against women: a matter for the State:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur210012006>

Russian Federation: Nowhere to turn to: Violence against women in the family:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur460562005>

Spain: More than words. Making protection and justice a reality for women who suffer gender based violence in the home:

EUR 41/005/2005, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur410052005>

Turkey: Women confronting family violence:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur440132004>

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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