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Nicaragua: Authorities should support law protecting women from violence

The Nicaraguan authorities should support a landmark law that defines crimes of violence against women and guarantee its full implementation, Amnesty International said today.

Law 779 (*Ley Integral contra la Violencia hacia la Mujer*, Integral Law against Violence against Women) provides a route for women to access justice and protection from violence and to hold perpetrators to account.

However, since it was passed last year the law has been consistently threatened by opponents who assert it is anti-family and anti-men, and that it is responsible for breaking up families.

“The violence perpetrated against women and children is what breaks up families, not legislation designed to help victims escape from violence and hold abusers to account,” said Esther Major, Amnesty International’s Researcher on Nicaragua.

“If the Nicaraguan authorities are serious about preventing violence from breaking up families, then Law 779 should be fully supported, resourced and implemented. Attempts to undermine the implementation of this law must be stopped.”

The very existence of Law 779 is an acknowledgement that Nicaragua needs to address violence against women.

“The problem here is that less than a year since the law came into effect, and before it has had a chance to be properly implemented, this landmark text is under attack,” said Major.

Under Law 779, mediation between victims of violence and their abusers is prohibited. However, in a worrying development, some magistrates have recently been quoted as saying that mediation may be acceptable in cases of violence against women where the abuser receives a sentence of five years or less.

“There are sound reasons why the law prohibits mediation in cases of violence against women. Where women are subjected to violence, there is an imbalance of power in the relationship, and conciliation can make victims more vulnerable to abuse and violence in the future,” said Major.

“The authorities must guarantee women and girls access to legal procedures that will bring justice in criminal and civil cases, and which will secure their safety.”