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PROTECTION FOR WOMEN

VIOLENCE IN THE FAMILY IN MEXICO

**STOP VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN**

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**





ALMOST ONE IN FOUR WOMEN IN MEXICO HAS SUFFERED PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE AT THE HANDS OF THEIR PARTNER. MANY LIVE WITH THE CONSTANT THREAT OF REPEATED VIOLENCE BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF EFFECTIVE PROTECTION.

Violence in the family is a human rights violation committed behind closed doors in thousands of apparently ordinary homes in Mexico. It can have profound physical, psychological, and emotional effects, as well as serious economic and social consequences on women and their families.

In Mexico there is still insufficient understanding or acknowledgement by many senior officials, particularly at state level, that violence against women constitutes a serious human rights violation and that the state has a responsibility to take appropriate steps to prevent it.

Women who experience violence in the family have to confront many practical difficulties in their struggle for justice. The lack of adequate protection for victims of violence in the family frequently exposes women to repeated abuse.

Article 27 of Mexico's General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free from Violence states that "when they are made aware of acts that may constitute offences or crimes involving violence against women" protection orders must be issued immediately by the relevant authorities.

The reality is that protection or restraining orders are rarely used or enforced. Few police and social service units have teams specifically dedicated to enforcing protection

orders. As a result, women who need urgent help because a protection order has been breached have no option other than to ring the general police emergency number or to complain to a court – neither of which guarantees they will get the immediate help they need.

Social services and public prosecutor's offices often encourage conciliation and arbitration between those responsible for violence in the home and their victims, rather than pursuing criminal prosecutions. As part of the conciliation process, many women have to deliver in person the letter notifying their attacker of the mediation meeting. Many women do not deliver the letters for fear of retaliation and their cases are then effectively closed. Even when a conciliation agreement is secured, there is little follow-up to ensure compliance and the violence may continue.

Shelters for survivors of violence in the family play an important role in providing women and their children with a place of temporary safety, medical and psychological treatment, legal advice, professional training and information on the options available to avoid returning to a violent situation. There are currently 60 shelters in the whole of Mexico. More than half are run by civil society organizations. There is an urgent need for state and municipal authorities to fund and extend the coverage of shelters for women survivors of domestic violence.

Juliana Quintanilla, a human rights and women's activist, calls for an end to violence against women, Cuernavaca, Morelos State, November 2006.

A close-up, profile view of a woman with short, wavy grey hair, wearing a red t-shirt. She is speaking into a black microphone. The background shows a public gathering with other people, including a woman in a white shirt and pink skirt, and a brick building in the distance.

“THEY TOLD ME TO TAKE THE SUMMONS LETTER TO MY HUSBAND, BUT I WAS AFRAID TO EVEN LEAVE THE HOUSE .”

Cecilia, Oaxaca, June 2006.

“IN JUNE [2006] I WENT TO THE LOCAL PUBLIC PROSECUTOR’S OFFICE AFTER BEING BEATEN BY MY HUSBAND. THERE WAS ANOTHER SEVERELY BEATEN LADY THERE. THE LOCAL PROSECUTOR TOLD THE LADY HE COULDN’T HELP HER AND THEN HE SAID TO ME ‘I DON’T KNOW WHAT I AM GOING TO DO WITH THIS LADY AS SHE HAS ALREADY BEEN HERE SEVERAL TIMES ’.”

Rosa, Oaxaca State, June 2006

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MAKING THE LAW A REALITY

In recent years there has been some acknowledgement by the Mexican authorities that they have a responsibility to take action against all forms of gender-based violence. The General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free from Violence was enacted in 2007 and establishes the legal basis for the authorities to assume their responsibilities in relation to different

types of gender-based violence. Similar laws have been passed in 24 of Mexico's 31 states.

Amnesty International welcomes this legislation as a positive advance, but is concerned that the implementation of the new laws has so far not focused on removing the real obstacles preventing women from registering complaints or improving prosecutions. Practical measures to improve the registration, investigation and

prosecution of violence against women in the home should be sought, in consultation with civil society organizations.

There remains an urgent need to bridge the gap between the law and its implementation. It is vital that the federal government and state governments back up the 2007 General Law with political commitment, resources, training and accountability.

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On 31 August 2005, Marcela Blumenkron Romero's former husband broke into her home in Hermosillo, Sonora State, and stabbed her in the back. The attack

left her paralyzed for four months and with serious long-term nerve damage and limited mobility.

On numerous occasions over the years, she had made emergency calls to police, reporting threats and harassment by her former husband. She told Amnesty International that she filed more than 10 complaints at the public prosecutor's office.

On every occasion she was refused protection. Between June and August 2005 Marcela Blumenkron filed six complaints with the public prosecutor's office for sexual harassment, intimidation and death threats. On one occasion, she says she was told: "When you come with a bruise, we'll do something".

For more information see Amnesty International's report, *Women's struggle for justice and safety – Violence in the family in Mexico* (AMR 41/021/2008).

Front cover: March 2006, San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas State.

TAKE ACTION NOW

PLEASE WRITE TO THE MEXICAN AUTHORITIES, CALLING ON THEM TO:

Ensure the immediate and effective implementation of the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free from Violence at federal and state level. In particular:

- Create special police units to respond immediately to emergency calls reporting violence against women in the family and to enforce restraining orders;
- Review conciliation procedures to ensure women are not placed in increased danger or pressured to drop criminal prosecution;
- Prohibit officials from asking victims to deliver summons letters to their aggressors;
- Fund and extend the coverage of temporary shelters for women survivors of domestic violence.

SIGN UP TO OUR ONLINE PETITION
www.alzatuvoz.org/mujeres/

SEND APPEALS TO:

Minister of Interior
Fernando Gómez Mont
Secretaría de Gobernación
Bucareli 99, 1er. piso, Col. Juárez
Delegación Cuauhtémoc México D.F.,
C.P.06600 – Mexico
Fax: (+52 55) 5093 3414
Salutation: Señor Secretario/Dear Minister

Governor of Morelos
Lic. Marco Antonio Adame Castillo
Gobernador del Estado de Morelos
Palacio de Gobierno 1° Piso,
Centro Cuernavaca 62000
Estado de Morelos – Mexico
Fax: (+52 777) 3 29 23 30.
If someone answers say "me da tono de fax por favor".
Salutation: Dear Governor/Señor Gobernador

Governor of Sonora
Gobernador del Estado de Sonora
Ing. Eduardo Bours Castelo
Palacio de Gobierno
Dr. Paliza y Comonfort
Hermosillo, 83260
Estado de Sonora – Mexico
Fax: (+52 662) 2174126
Salutation: Dear Governor/Señor Gobernador

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Amnesty International is a global movement of 2.2 million people in more than 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion – funded mainly by our membership and public donations.

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