

**30 March 2006**

**AI Index: EUR 21/004/2006**

## **FRANCE: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity?**

### **Women in France ask why their human rights are being abused**

In France, a woman dies every four days after being beaten by her partner. More than half of those women killed have previously been subjected to domestic violence. Domestic violence is a human rights abuse.

Why are the rights of these women not protected?

In a country which claims to be the cradle of human rights and is signatory of the main human rights treaties, women's rights to liberty, equality, security and sometimes the right to life, are often abused. While these rights must be respected and guaranteed by the French government, the reality is that both the prevention of domestic violence and the protection of victims are relatively ineffective.

Protection mechanisms, although they exist, are not working well. Women have little knowledge of their rights and information is not made accessible. Temporary accommodation possibilities for victims of domestic violence are insufficient. And doctors are not always responsive when it comes to making assessments of violations that could be used as evidence in court. For prevention to work police officers, magistrates, health and welfare workers must receive adequate training. For women to receive support hotlines, shelters and counselling must be easily accessible.

*The magistrate: "The charge is that you assaulted a person."*

*The accused: "But it wasn't a person sir, it was my wife."*

- Quote presented by a police commander to the Seminar on Violence against Women and the Law, held on 31 March 2005.

French law does see domestic violence as a criminal offence and the offence is aggravated if the perpetrator is a spouse or cohabiting partner, but judicial processes are not far-reaching enough. "Repeated assault" is not qualified as an offence. Lodging a complaint is a long and complex procedure. And although legal tools do exist, courts remain half-hearted. If a court decides on 'penal mediation', as in many cases it does, the aggressor is not punished.

France has many weaknesses in combating violence in the family. It is a widespread crime that is concealed because people think there should be no interference in family affairs. But the State must see this "private" matter as a public affair, like any other human rights abuse. Domestic violence is everyone's concern and must be eradicated.

By implementing its international obligations, France could become a champion of women's rights.

#### **Links:**

Violence against Women in France – an "Affair of the State" (in English)  
[<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur210012006>]