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Bahrain

Adequate housing urgently needed

My name is Um Issa. I was married in 1994 and I was just 16 years old. I have two children, a 10-year-old and a two-year-old. I was really hurt by my husband -- he used to beat me up and once he raped me. He took drugs and stole from the house. He didn't work, didn't provide money to the family and didn't treat me wife or the children well.

I lost my patience and went to the Shari'a court. The court did not help me and the judge kept postponing the court hearing. I spend three years of my life in courtrooms and more yet to come. They want me to waive my rights to have the custody of children or even the house.

The last date for the court hearing was on September 2006. And they always postpone it, why do they postpone it? Why do they want to waste our time?

The house is his. He was awarded the house through a housing scheme, but I pay for it; they deduct a monthly payment of my salary because he doesn't work. Now he lives in the house and is using drugs there, while I am homeless with my children.

There are scores of similar stories all over Gulf countries where women either choose to leave the marital house or are forced to remain in abusive relationships because they have nowhere else to go.

A lack of adequate temporary housing in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) -- Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates -- means that women have little opportunity to seek redress in a secure and safe environment.

There are no government-supported shelters for women who have suffered violence in GCC countries. Charitable organizations and some embassies have attempted to house survivors of domestic violence in homes or housing facilities. However, the few such homes that exist are often only able to offer limited help.

Call to action

Write to the Secretary General of the GCC, calling on all governments of the GCC to take immediate action to provide women and girls suffering from violence with adequate housing and other support.

Sample letter

Dear Secretary General,

I am writing to express concern that women suffering from violence in the home do not have access to adequate temporary housing in the GCC.

I urge you to take immediate action to guarantee services for women who face violence by creating hotlines linked to institutions that offer protection to these women, and by providing safe houses and shelters to protect women and children from violence.

I urge you to call on the governments of the GCC to ensure that serious action is taken to stamp out gender-based discrimination, which facilitates violence against women.

This appeal is part of Amnesty International's worldwide campaign to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November, focusing on shelters for women who suffer domestic violence.

Yours sincerely,

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