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Algeria: Women left unprotected from violence and discrimination

Amnesty International today highlighted the Algerian government's failure to protect women against rape, beatings and widespread legal and economic discrimination, in a 38-page briefing to the United Nations.

The briefing also describes the consequences for women of the government's failure to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for thousands of 'disappearances' during Algeria's brutal internal conflict in the 1990's.

"Thousands of women have been denied their right to a normal life and are left with the agony of not knowing the fate of their husbands, sons, brothers and fathers." Amnesty International said.

In its briefing to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Amnesty International shows that women have little prospect of obtaining justice and redress for abuses they have suffered and that current laws and practice continue to discriminate against women and facilitate violence against them. Algeria will appear before the Committee for examination of its implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on 11 January.

Based on interviews with Algerian women survivors of violence and a range of organizations and activists both inside and outside Algeria, Amnesty International's main observations include:

Discriminatory provisions in the Family Code have facilitated violence against women, legitimized discrimination in practice and made it particularly difficult for women to deal with the consequences of widespread human rights abuses.

A continuing lack of thorough investigations into allegations of rape and other forms of sexual violence against women and a failure to bring those responsible to justice.

Inadequate training for police, judges and other law enforcement officials dealing with cases of sexual violence or violence in the family.

The virtual non-existence of state care for women survivors of sexual violence, despite the psychological trauma and social stigma they face.

As a consequence of the "disappearance" of a male relative, thousands of women suffer economic hardship, which is compounded by laws that deny many access to pensions, savings and property.

The existence of discriminatory laws such as a legal duty to obey the husband and the husband's prerogative of unilateral divorce with no duty to pay maintenance or provide housing.

"The government of Algeria has shown a lack of political will to ensure that women are protected

from violence. Algeria's reservations to CEDAW are a serious impediment towards guaranteeing the fundamental rights of women and should be lifted," Amnesty International said.

An Amnesty International representative will be present to observe the session of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in January 2005.

For the full text of Amnesty International's briefing to the CEDAW Committee please see:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde280112004>

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