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Solomon Islands: Amnesty International welcomes commitment to criminalize violence against women, including spousal rape, and urges renewed action to ensure women's freedom from violence in informal settlements

Human Rights Council adopts Universal Periodic Review outcome on Solomon Islands

Amnesty International welcomes the focus in the review on violence against women.¹ A 2009 survey, conducted by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and the government, revealed that 64% of women and girls in Solomon Islands between the ages of 15 and 49 had experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their partners or other family members. The organization calls on the government to implement fully its Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy and the National Policy on Eliminating Violence against Women.²

Amnesty International welcomes the statement by Solomon Islands that it is in the process of enacting legislation to criminalize all forms of violence against women, including spousal rape, and its commitment to facilitate the reporting, investigation and prosecution of domestic violence cases.³ However, it notes that violence within the family continues to be seen as a private issue and the police may therefore be reluctant to intervene. Amnesty International's investigations also reveal that lawyers in the Public Solicitors Office have refused to represent victims of domestic violence seeking a restraining order unless the victim had visible injuries to her body. The organization urges the government to ensure prompt and effective implementation of recommendations related to violence against women.

Amnesty International's research reveals a dire human rights situation in informal settlements in Honiara, with few sources of clean water nearby.⁴ Women and girls must walk long distances to the nearest streams to collect water, and residents have to wash their clothes, kitchen utensils and themselves in dirty, contaminated water. According to a 2009 study, only a quarter of residents had adequate toilet facilities.⁵ Amnesty International welcomes that Solomon Islands accepted the recommendation to ensure a supply of good quality water to all informal settlements and urges its prompt implementation.

Women and girls in the settlements risk physical and sexual violence, when collecting water, bathing, or using toilets at night. In August 2010, a 37 year old woman in the Mamanawata settlement told Amnesty International that she had been severely beaten up and raped by two men after relieving herself in the sea. The men were very violent and she did not dare report

¹ A/HRC/18/8, recommendations 80.2 (Ecuador), 80.3 (United States), 80.4 (United States), 80.5 (Brazil), 80.6 (Norway), 80.7 (Canada), 80.8 (Slovenia), 80.9 (United Kingdom), 80.10 (Indonesia), 80.11 (New Zealand), 80.12 (Trinidad and Tobago), 80.24 (Maldives), 80.27 (Ecuador), 80.28 (Argentina), 80.29 (Norway), 80.30 (France), 80.35 (New Zealand), 81.25 (Australia), 81.26 (Chile), 81.52 (Morocco).

² Ibid., recommendations 81.25 (Australia), 81.26 (Chile), 81.27 (UK).

³ See footnote 1.

⁴ *'Where is the dignity in that?' Women in Solomon Islands denied sanitation and safety* (Index: ASA 43/001/2011).

⁵ J. Maubuta and H. E. Maebuta, "Household Livelihoods in Solomon Islands Squatter Settlements and its Implications for Education and Development in Post-conflict Context" (paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education International Education Research Conference, Canberra, 29 November – 3 December 2009).

them to the police. The organization urges Solomon Islands to guarantee the right of women to live free from violence and discrimination and guarantee their right to clean water and adequate sanitation.

Amnesty International welcomes the commitment by Solomon Islands to establish a National Human Rights Institution fully compliant with the Paris Principles.⁶

Background

The UN Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Solomon Islands on 21 September 2011 at its 18th session. Prior to the adoption of the report of the review Amnesty International delivered the oral statement above. Amnesty International also contributed to the information basis of the review through its submission on Solomon Islands: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA43/001/2010/en>

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⁶ Ibid., paragraphs 79.1 (Canada), 79.2 (Ireland), 79.3 (Argentina), 79.4 (Spain), 79.5 (United Kingdom), 79.6 (Morocco), 79.7 (Indonesia).