

[COVER]

It's in our hands

STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Summary

Amnesty International

[Inside front cover]

Cover photo: Refugees from the conflict in Kosovo. © Andrew Testa/Panos Pictures

[photo caption]

Right: Amnesty International prepares for the launch of its worldwide campaign to Stop Violence against Women by raising the issue at its biennial International Council Meeting in Mexico in August 2003. A giant banner with delegates' handprints is displayed, together with a poster demanding justice for the hundreds of women murdered in the Mexican cities of Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua. © AI

[end caption]

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Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of people who campaign for internationally recognized human rights to be respected and protected.

Amnesty International's vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

In pursuit of this vision, Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.

Amnesty International is independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion. It does not support or oppose any government or political system, nor does it support or oppose the views of the victims whose rights it seeks to protect. It is concerned solely with the impartial protection of human rights.

Amnesty International is a democratic, self-governing movement with more than 1.5 million members and supporters in over 150 countries and territories in every region of the world. It is funded largely by its

worldwide membership and public do

Summary

From birth to death, in times of peace as well as war, women face discrimination and violence at the hands of the state, the community and the family. Female infanticide deprives countless women of life itself. Every year, millions of women are raped by partners, relatives, friends and strangers, by employers and colleagues, security officials and soldiers. Women, children and men suffer from violence inflicted in the home, but the overwhelming majority of victims are women and girls. During armed conflicts, violence against women is often used as a weapon of war, in order to dehumanize the women themselves, or to persecute the community to which they belong.

Violence against women is not confined to any particular political or economic system, but is prevalent in every society in the world. It cuts across boundaries of wealth, race and culture. The power structures within society which perpetuate violence against women are deep-rooted and intransigent. The experience or threat of violence inhibits women everywhere from fully exercising and enjoying their human rights.

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"I really don't know what it was that evening that made me decide to call the police, but I always say it was the sight of cleaning up my own blood." Lorraine, a British woman, was regularly beaten by her partner for eight years before telling anybody. "People have asked me why I didn't just leave, but my partner made lots of threats to me which he always carried out. I was very, very frightened of him. So you get to the point where you live with it, it becomes a normal pattern of life, you adapt, you cope, you hide it." In the UK, emergency services receive an average of one call per minute about violence in the family.

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Women throughout the world have organized to expose and counter violence against women. They have achieved dramatic changes in laws, policies and practices. They have brought the violations out of the shadows and into the spotlight. They have established that violence against women demands a response from governments, communities and individuals. Above all, they have challenged the view of women as passive victims of violence. Despite the obstacles they face in many countries, women are leading the struggle to prevent violence against women. However, in many countries women's rights activists have been confronted by a "backlash" from forces that see gender equality as a threat to social stability and entrenched economic interests. In parts of the world, gains by women are being reversed or ignored.

A human rights scandal

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Sixteen-year-old Ndambo was raped by three soldiers in a field near Uvira, South-Kivu province, in the war-torn Democratic Republic of the Congo. They shot at her mother when she tried to protect her. Unable to walk after the attack, Ndambo was carried to the hospital. Because she had no money, she received no treatment, and was unable to procure the document proving rape. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated that some 5,000 women had been raped in the area between October 2002 and February 2003, an average of 40 a day.

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The statistics on violence against women reveal a worldwide human rights catastrophe.

- At least one out of every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. Usually, the abuser is a member of her own family or someone known to her.¹
- The Council of Europe has stated that domestic violence is the major cause of death and disability for women aged 16 to 44 and accounts for more death and ill-health than cancer or traffic accidents.
- More than 60 million women are “missing” from the world today as a result of sex-selective abortions and female infanticide. China’s last census in the year 2000 revealed that the ratio of new-born girls to boys was 100:119. The biological norm is 100:103.
- In the USA, women accounted for 85 per cent of the victims of domestic violence in 1999, according to the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women.
- The Russian government estimates that 14,000 women were killed by their partners or relatives in 1999, yet the country still has no law specifically addressing domestic violence.
- The World Health Organization has reported that up to 70 per cent of female murder victims are killed by their male partners.

Such statistics represent the tip of the iceberg. Violence against women is generally under-reported because women are ashamed or fear disbelief, hostility or further violence.

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Fifteen schoolgirls were burned to death and dozens of others were injured in a fire at their school in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, on 11 March 2002. Religious police prevented the girls from leaving the building because they were not wearing headscarves and had no male relatives there to receive them. They also reportedly prevented rescuers who were men from entering the premises.

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Violence against women includes:

Violence in the family. This includes battering by intimate partners, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape and female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women. It also covers abuse of domestic workers such as involuntary confinement, physical brutality, slavery-like conditions and sexual assault.

Violence in the community. This includes rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and assault at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere. Trafficking, forced prostitution and forced labour fall into this category, which also covers rape and other abuses by armed groups.

Violence by the state. This includes acts of violence committed or condoned by police, prison guards, soldiers, border guards, immigration officials and so on, such as rape by government forces during armed conflict, torture in custody and violence by officials against refugee women.

In any of these categories, violence may be physical, psychological, and sexual.

[end box]

¹ 1 Ending Violence Against Women, Population Reports, No. 11. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health, December 1999, p. 1.

[photo caption]

Celebrating the opening of the first safe house in Kenya to shelter girls threatened with female genital mutilation. Throughout the world, women are claiming the right to live free from the fear of violence and bringing hope to new generations of girls. © Paula Allen

[end caption]

Roots of violence

The underlying cause of violence against women lies in discrimination which denies women equality with men in all areas of life. Violence is both rooted in discrimination and serves to reinforce discrimination.

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women states that violence against women is a “manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men” and that “violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men”.

Multiple jeopardy

Violence against women is not “natural” or “inevitable”. It is an expression of historically and culturally specific values and standards. Social and political institutions foster women’s subservience and violence against women. Certain cultural practices and traditions – particularly those related to notions of purity and chastity – are invoked to explain or excuse such violence.

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Violence against women: a definition

Amnesty International bases its work on the definition in the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women: “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” (Paragraph 1) Gender-based violence against women is violence directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. Progressive interpretations of this definition affirm that acts of omission, such as neglect or deprivation, and structural violence (harm arising from the organization of the economy) can constitute violence against women.

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Although violence against women is universal, many women are targeted because of their race, class, culture, sexual identity or HIV status.

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In September 2002, a 20-year-old Jordanian man was sentenced to just 12 months in prison for the murder of his sister. He had strangled her with a telephone cord when he found out that she had been pregnant when she married her husband. In its ruling, the court decided to reduce the premeditated murder charge to a misdemeanour because the woman had “tarnished her family’s honour and reputation”.

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Poverty and marginalization fuel violence against women and also result from it. Worldwide women have a higher incidence of poverty than men; their poverty is more severe than that of men; and increasing numbers of women are poor. While the negative effects of globalization are leaving more and more women trapped on the margins of society, it is extremely difficult for such women to escape abusive situations and to obtain protection and redress. Illiteracy and poverty severely restrict women's ability to organize to fight for change.

Young women are often subject to sexual assault not only because they are women, but also because they are young and vulnerable. In some societies, girls have been subjected to forced sex because of the fallacy that sex with a virgin will cure a man of HIV/AIDS. However, age provides no protection. While some societies respect elderly women's wisdom and afford them greater status and autonomy, others abuse those who are frail and alone, particularly widows.

Control of women's sexuality is a powerful means through which men exert their dominance over women. Women who do not conform to accepted standards of femininity often face severe punishments. Men's ability to control women's sexual expression and their reproductive lives is reinforced by the actions or inaction of the state.

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"They locked me in a room and brought him every day to rape me so I would fall pregnant and be forced to marry him. They did this to me until I was pregnant."

The testimony of a young Zimbabwean lesbian whose family locked her up and forced her to submit to being raped by an older man, in order to "correct" her sexual orientation.

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Reproductive rights – the right to reproductive health care and the right to reproductive autonomy – are central to women's control over their own lives. Women have the right to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children. They have the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. This requires access to healthcare and information and education about contraception. Women have the right to make decisions free from discrimination, coercion and violence.

Violence in conflicts devastates the lives of both men and women, but systematic rape, as seen in many recent conflicts, is primarily directed at girls and women. Rape, mutilation and murder of women and girls are common practices of warfare, committed both by government forces and armed groups.

Gender-specific forms of violence are also endemic in militarized or war-torn societies. In societies heavily influenced by gun culture, the ownership and use of arms reinforces existing gender inequalities, strengthening the dominant position of men and maintaining women's subordination. Violent disputes in the home often become more lethal to women and girls when men have guns.

[photo caption]

A dalit woman (a member of a socially and economically marginalized caste) washes her hair. Because of her caste she is not allowed to use the public water supply. © Giuseppe Benanti

[end caption]

Long-term damage, widespread harm

The consequences of violence against women go far beyond immediate physical damage to the victim. Psychological damage, and the threat of further violence, erode a woman's self-esteem, inhibiting her ability to defend herself or take action against her abuser. When the violence is unrecognized and unacknowledged, there are further psychological consequences and the woman is less likely to seek help. Some of the long-term effects of violence against women are abuse of alcohol and drugs, depression, other mental health disorders and suicide.

The repercussions of violence against women reverberate throughout the family and community. Children exposed to violence are more likely to become both victims and perpetrators.

Actual or threatened violence creates a pervasive atmosphere of fear that limits the lives of women, restricting their freedom of movement and their ability to participate in public decision-making and affecting their standard of living.

Violence against women impoverishes society economically, politically and culturally. The direct economic costs of violence against women are enormous, in terms of lost working time, lost earnings and medical expenditure. The indirect costs of limiting the active role that women can take in the development of their community are unquantifiable.

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"She told me, 'If you get pregnant again, you will die. You might even die today. So you have to sign this.' I was scared and I signed."

A 22-year-old Roma woman describes how a nurse persuaded her to agree to be sterilized as she lay on a hospital operating table before giving birth. In Eastern Slovakia, researchers found a pattern of forced and coerced sterilization of Roma women. In most cases, doctors or nurses gave the women misleading or threatening information in order to make them agree to be sterilized while undergoing caesarean delivery.

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Violence unchecked

As long as the perpetrators of violence against women can commit their crimes without fear of prosecution or punishment, the cycle of violence will never be broken.

In some countries, discrimination against women is written into the law. Even where laws are not discriminatory, the actual practices of government agencies, police and prosecutors often foster discrimination and violence against women. In many countries, the laws are inadequate, the police force is uninterested and the criminal justice system is remote, expensive and biased against women. Unless a woman can show physical evidence of the violence she has suffered, police and other law enforcement authorities are often unwilling to believe and assist her. Many communities are complicit in excusing or condoning violence against women, and tacitly approve state failures to bring perpetrators to justice.

Impunity for violence against women is complex – many women are unwilling to pursue members of their family through the legal system because of emotional attachments and the fear of losing custody of their children. Women are also discouraged from seeking justice through the courts because too often criminal justice systems hold them responsible for violence, asserting that it was “incited” or “instigated” by the woman's own behaviour. Since women are often denied equal access to economic and social rights, many do not have the resources to access the legal system.

Accountability

Sometimes government officials such as the police or security forces are directly responsible for acts of violence against women. However, in many cases, the perpetrator is not an agent of the state but a private

individual, group of individuals or organization. Husbands, family members, doctors, religious leaders, the media, bosses and businesses may all be responsible for violence against women. Amnesty International believes that these private (non-state) actors must respect human rights. Everyone has basic duties in relation to human rights.

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"That night I called the ambulance, no ambulance came. I called the police, no police came."

Joy struggled through 10 years of brutal violence at the hands of her husband, a police officer in Barbados. In August 2000, her husband tried to kill her with a cement block, and she was only saved by members of his family. Joy's husband is now under a restraining order to prevent him from abusing her.

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The human rights community customarily holds governments accountable for their failure to prevent violence against women, and looks to governments to take measures to protect their human rights. Many other groups of people have power over women's lives and should be held to account when they commit or condone acts of violence against women, or when they fail to fulfil their responsibilities to protect women from violence.

In many countries parallel authorities run by clan elders, tribal chiefs or religious leaders exert formal or informal control over women's lives. Sometimes they commit acts of violence against women; sometimes they encourage or permit such acts. However, in countries where the criminal justice system is ineffective, such authorities may also be – in some cases – the only effective means of providing redress for women who assert their rights.

Power over key rights for women, such as education and social services, often rests with local or municipal authorities rather than national governments. These authorities also have the power to protect women from violence, through the police, courts and shelters.

[photo caption]

Ellinah Myeni, a South African woman dying from HIV/AIDS, wanted her funeral to be used to raise awareness of the pandemic. At her funeral in April 2003, members of non-governmental organizations promoting the interests of people living with HIV/AIDS played a prominent role. © Peter McKenzie/Panapress

[end caption]

Some of the most horrifying accounts of rape, mutilation and murder of women and girls have emerged from recent conflicts across the globe, committed both by government forces and armed groups. Armed groups should be held accountable for acts of violence against women committed by their forces.

Accountability may be particularly difficult to establish when the pattern of abuse crosses national borders. Trafficking of women and girls, the abuse of migrant workers or refugees and the plight of irregular or undocumented migrants raise particular challenges of how to ensure protection and remedies for women for whom no country acknowledges responsibility.

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"It is impossible for a woman to complain about forced marriage... If she complains the family will kill her."

A woman interviewed by Amnesty International in Jalalabad, in eastern Afghanistan.

[end sidebar]

The human rights framework

One of the achievements of women's rights activists has been to demonstrate that violence against women is a human rights violation. This changes the perception of violence against women from a private matter to one of public concern and means that public authorities are required to take action. The parallel development of international and regional human rights standards reinforces this accountability.

Framing violence against women as a human rights issue creates a common language for the work of anti-violence activists and facilitates global and regional networks. These networks are taking their own governments to task, and instigating new international legal standards and practices. The explicit inclusion of rape as a war crime and crime against humanity in the statutes of international criminal tribunals exemplifies these new standards.

The human rights framework also specifies governments' obligations under international law to promote and protect women's human rights. It provides mechanisms for holding governments to account if they fail to meet these obligations.

[photo caption]

This woman was raped at the age of 20 within a relationship. She is a member of the non-governmental organization Women Against Rape. Rape is a profound violation of a woman's physical and mental integrity and can be a form of torture, an offence so serious that it is of concern to the entire international community. © Cristel Amiss@Crossroads Photo Collective

[end caption]

One of the most powerful features of the human rights framework is the core principle that human rights are universal – all people have equal rights by virtue of being human. The appeal to universality counters one of the most common excuses used to justify violence against women, that it is acceptable because it is part of the society's culture. All human rights should be enjoyed by all people, and culture or tradition do not excuse the violation of women's basic human rights.

The struggle to establish women's rights as human rights has not been easy. Non-governmental organizations, civil society groups and political parties are not immune from prevailing social attitudes, and some still do not recognize women's rights as human rights. Undoubtedly, some include men who are themselves perpetrators of violence against women.

In communities or societies which view the woman's role as confined to family responsibilities, women's human rights activists have to overcome the prejudice against women taking a leadership role. Women protesting against discriminatory laws and practices are often accused of being traitors to their faith or culture or enemies of the state. Activists promoting rights central to women's identity and autonomy, such as sexual and reproductive rights, face particular hostility.

Despite the risks, programs and projects to address, combat and prevent violence against women have flourished over the past decades. An enormous range of anti-violence initiatives now operate in all parts of the world. Some are run by small grass-roots women's groups, others by large international agencies, and still others by governments. Moreover, growing research efforts have resulted in an increasingly detailed and sophisticated understanding of the causes and consequences of violence against women. Yet the violence continues.

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Grace Patrick Akpan was stopped by police officers for an identity check in Catanzaro, Italy, in February 1996. When she told them that she was an Italian citizen, they answered that "a black woman cannot be an Italian citizen". She was physically assaulted by the officers and required two weeks' hospital treatment. In October 1999, almost three years later, the officers responsible were found guilty of abusing their powers and causing Grace Patrick Akpan's injuries. They were sentenced to just two months' probation.

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Amnesty International's campaign

Amnesty International's campaign to stop violence against women, launched in March 2004, is intended as a contribution to the efforts of women's rights movements around the world.

The report published for the launch of the campaign – *It's in our hands: Stop violence against women* (AI Index No: ACT 77/001/2004), of which this is a summary, highlights the responsibility of the state, the community and individuals for taking action to end violence against women. It aims to show that women's self-organization, bolstered by the solidarity and support of the human rights movement, is the most effective way to overcome violence against women. Amnesty International's campaign is designed to mobilize both men and women to work to counter violence and to use the power and persuasion of the human rights framework in the efforts to stop violence against women.

[photo caption]

A survivor of sexual violence in Sierra Leone, where systematic rape and other forms of sexual violence have been used as weapons of war and to instil terror during a decade of internal conflict. © ICRC/Nick Danziger

[end caption]

Amnesty International's Agenda for Change

In the home and in the community, in times of war and peace, women and girls are beaten, raped, mutilated and killed with impunity. Violence and the threat of violence affect the ability of all women to exercise their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights and diminish all our lives. As long as violence against women continues, the promise to humanity of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights cannot be fulfilled.

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Flor, a 48-year-old migrant worker from the Philippines working in Saudi Arabia, testified that she injured her back trying to escape from an abusive employer, and was then imprisoned for five months. "When I arrived in prison," Flor explained, "I could not walk and I had to crawl."

[end sidebar]

This is not to deny the achievements of the women's and human rights movements at international, national and local levels, but to acknowledge that countless women face physical, sexual and mental abuse at the hands of close relatives as well as strangers. All too often, communities tolerate violence against women and deny women the freedom to choose how to live their lives. Local, regional and national authorities fail to prevent and punish acts of violence, and do not provide an environment free from violence. In conflict zones, both government forces and armed groups commit atrocities against women with impunity.

Internationally, the performance of UN bodies is uneven and in many areas should be significantly improved, while international financial institutions and corporations fail to fulfil their responsibilities towards women.

Violence against women is never normal, legal or acceptable and should never be tolerated or justified. Everyone – individuals, communities, governments, and international bodies – has a responsibility to put a stop to it and to redress the suffering it causes.

Change must come at international, national and local levels. It must be brought about by governments as well as private actors, by institutions as well as individuals. International treaties must be respected, laws must be adopted or abolished, support systems must be put in place and above all attitudes, prejudices and social beliefs that foster and reinforce violence against women must change.

[photo caption]

Iraqi women walk past a US tank at Al Kadhimiya mosque in Baghdad. After enduring decades of repression and three wars, the women of Iraq now face new hardships, insecurity and increasing restrictions. © AP

[end caption]

Preventing violence against women requires us to:

- Speak out against violence against women, listen to women and believe them;
- Condemn violence against women as the major human rights scandal of our times;
- Confront those in authority if they fail to prevent, punish and redress violence against women;
- Challenge religious, social, and cultural attitudes and stereotypes which diminish women's humanity;
- Promote women's equal access to political power, decision-making and resources; and
- Support women to organize themselves to stop the violence.

[sidebar]

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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Amnesty International will collaborate with women's rights activists and groups who are already working to expose and redress forms of violence. Amnesty International will investigate and expose acts of violence against women and demand that these violations are acknowledged, publicly condemned and redressed.

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"Everyone has the right to take part in the government of [their] country, directly or through freely chosen representatives."

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

[end sidebar]

At the global level the Stop Violence against Women campaign:

Calls on world leaders, organizations and individuals to publicly pledge to make the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – which promised equal rights and equal protection for all – a reality for all women.

At the international level the Stop Violence against Women campaign:

Urges all governments to:

- Ratify and implement the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, without reservations.
- Ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and adopt implementing national legislation to end impunity for violence against women in armed conflicts.
- Agree on an international Arms Trade Treaty to stop the proliferation of weapons used to commit violence against women.

Calls on UN and regional organizations to:

- Assist countries to develop action plans to end violence against women, and set up mechanisms to monitor their implementation.
- Fully and speedily implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security as well as the recommendations contained in the study by the UN Secretary-General on Women, Peace and Security.

[photo caption]

Thousands of women join a lesbian march in Mexico in March 2003. All over the world, women are asserting their right to sexual self-determination despite the widespread use of violence to control women's sexuality.

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In the Philippines, women's groups spent several years organizing to bring about a revision in legislation on sexual violence that described rape as a "crime against chastity" under Philippine family law rather than as a violent crime against a person. Under the family law provision, in the case of rape, the woman had to prove that she did not willingly surrender her virginity. The law was finally changed in 1997 and rape was redefined as violence against a person.

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At the national level the Stop Violence against Women campaign:

- Demands the abolition of all laws that facilitate impunity for the rape or murder of women; criminalize consensual sexual relations in private; restrict a woman's right to choose her partner; and restrict women's access to reproductive health care and family planning.
- Calls for laws to be adopted and enforced to protect women, to ensure that violence in the family is treated as seriously as assaults in other contexts, and that rape and other violence against women is criminalized.
- Calls on national and local authorities to fund and support measures to enable all women to live free from violence, such as programs of civic education, training and systems to support and protect victims of violence, and women's human rights defenders.
- Urges governments, financial institutions and corporate actors to counter women's impoverishment by ensuring equal access to economic and social rights, including food, water, property, employment and social entitlements and by safeguarding social safety nets, particularly in times of economic stress and dislocation.

[photo caption]

Kheda Kungaeva's mother, Rosa, at the entrance to the tent where she lives. In March 2000, 18-year-old Kheda Kungaeva was seized from her home in Chechnya and taken to the tent of Russian army Colonel Yurii Budanov for interrogation. She was later found dead. She had been tortured and strangled and there was evidence suggesting that she had been raped. In July 2003, Yurii Budanov was found guilty of kidnapping, murder and exceeding the authority of his office,

and sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. The conviction was unprecedented - most violence in Chechnya is committed with complete impunity.

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At the local level the Stop Violence against Women campaign:

- Urges communities to work to create an environment which supports women and addresses violence, by building community structures and processes to protect women, providing assistance to survivors of violence, raising awareness about violence against women, and ensuring that women human rights defenders are free to carry out their work.
- Demands that women be given equal access to decision-making in local government and community structures.
- Calls on religious bodies, traditional and informal authorities to denounce and desist from any action that encourages or tolerates violence against women, and respect women's human rights.
- Demands that armed groups make clear to their forces and supporters that violence against women is never acceptable, and that they discipline appropriately those under their command responsible for committing such acts. Where they exercise effective control over territory, armed groups must take measures to protect women from discrimination and violence and ensure that all perpetrators of violence against women are brought to justice.
- Urges every individual to challenge negative images of women and resist mass media, advertisements and school curriculums that reinforce discriminatory attitudes and perpetuate violence against women and girls.
- Calls on communities to work with those most affected by violence to develop and implement local strategies to confront violence against women.

[sidebar]

"All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law."

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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[inside back cover]

[photo caption]

South Korean women used as sex slaves by the Japanese Imperial Army demand compensation and redress.

An estimated 200,000 women from across Asia were forced into military brothels during the Second World War. In 1991, in response to demands for an apology, a memorial and a thorough inquiry, the Japanese government claimed that there was no evidence of the forced drafting of Korean women as "comfort women". Anger at that response prompted many women to come forward and, in some cases, to file suits.

In 1998 a Japanese district court ruled in favour of three South Korean women who had filed a suit against Japan. However, the Hiroshima High Court over-ruled the decision, in line with the Japanese government's argument that it need not pay compensation to the women as all claims were settled by peace treaties that formally ended the war. None of the other cases filed have succeeded.

Although individual representatives of the Japanese government have issued a series of apologies, they have not spoken for the government as a whole. Japan has made no acknowledgment of legal liability and has undertaken no prosecutions.

[end caption]

[sidebars]

"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

"No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

[end sidebars]

[back cover]

It's in our hands

Stop violence against women

Summary

Violence against women is a global outrage. The experience or threat of violence affects the lives of women everywhere, cutting across boundaries of wealth, race and culture. In the home and in the community, in times of war and peace, women are beaten, raped, mutilated and killed with impunity.

This document is a summary of Amnesty International's report, *It's in our hands: Stop violence against women* which highlights the responsibility of the state, the community and individuals for taking action to end violence against women.

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