

Make violence against women history!

AI statement for the public hearing on the Domestic Violence and Related Matters Bill

At the Lagos State House of Assembly, 12 April 2006

- *It was “Folake” who was jailed after she accused a man of rape. A domestic worker, she said her employer’s husband had forced her into his bedroom and made her watch a violent videotape before forcing her to have sex. A medical examination supported her allegation. Yet she was the one brought to court, charged with slander for making the accusation, and remanded in prison until her family could raise the bail money to have her released. The material evidence of the crime, handed over to the police, was later said to have disappeared. No charges were brought against the man she accused.*
- *“Sometime in 1999, an uncle sexually assaulted a little girl of six years old. The matter was taken to court and prosecuted. In giving judgement however, the magistrate set the accused person free for lack of [corroboration]. This was in spite of the bloodied pants, the testimony of the mother who noticed the pains while bathing her, and the medical evidence from a government hospital. The magistrate said collaboration meant testimony from another person who witnessed the alleged act. It was the type of miscarriage of justice that I could not take. Here was a woman who was courageous enough to go to court in a society where silence on violence against women is the norm only to be told she could not get justice due to the technicalities of the law.”, a Nigerian human rights defender told Amnesty International in April 2005.*

Amnesty International welcomes the current discussion of a “*Domestic Violence and Other Related Matters Bill*” by the Lagos House of Assembly and the public hearing which is planned for 12 April, and thank you for the opportunity to address this public hearing.

In June 2005 Amnesty International launched a report - entitled *Nigeria Unheard voices – violence against women in the family* - on gender-based violence against women in the family in Nigeria, focusing on Lagos State. This report details how in Nigeria, as in many other parts of the world, women and girls suffer from gender-based violence in the family: they get ‘punished’ for supposed transgression, beaten, raped, or murdered. In some groups nearly two-thirds of women in Nigeria are believed to have experienced some form of violence in the family. The lack of official statistics makes assessing the extent of the gender-based violence an almost impossible task, but studies suggest the levels of violence are shockingly high.

Amnesty International believes that in Nigeria the violence persists because discriminatory laws condone and even legalize certain forms of gender-based violence against women. Furthermore, dismissive attitudes within the police and an inaccessible justice system compound the failure of the state to protect women’s rights. A culture of silence reinforces the stigma attached to the victim rather than the perpetrator of such crimes.

This is not a problem unique to Nigeria. Amnesty International’s research has shown that:

- 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 violence¹.

¹ *Stop Violence against Women: “It’s in our hands”*, AI Index: ACT 77/001/2004. Page 4.

- The World Health Organization has reported that up to 70 per cent of female murder victims are killed by their male partners.²
- On average, two women per week are killed by a male partner or former partner in the UK. Nearly half of all female murder victims are killed by a partner or ex-partner³
- In 2004, in Spain 72 women died at the hands of their partners or ex-partner, 7 of them despite having been granted protection measures.⁴

In the vast majority of countries, States and society do not recognise violence against women in intimate relationships as a *human rights violation* and therefore fail to engage with it as such. It is also apparent that in many countries, violence against women in intimate relationships is not identified as a gender-based crime.

In Nigeria, men and women are increasingly drawing attention to injustice and gender-based violence in the home. Amnesty International is supporting their campaign, and highlighting the abuse of human rights that family violence represents.

Amnesty International would like to remind the government of Lagos State, along with the Federal Government of Nigeria, that they have obligations under international human rights law to prevent gender-based violence against women and to assist women in escaping such violence. Perpetrators must be prosecuted, and victims of violence given full support.

Amnesty International is therefore calling for the authorities to:

- monitor all forms of violence against women and girls in the home;
- ban all forms of violence against women and girls in law and repeal laws that allow such violence to persist;
- end discrimination against women in the criminal justice system, in laws, policies and practices;
- take positive measures to challenge discriminatory social norms that affect women and girls.

Amnesty International is during its long-term campaign, called *Stop Violence against Women*, working intensely to break the silence around violence against women in intimate relationships and boldly states that this form of gender-based violence is a human rights violation and that it is unacceptable.

The main messages of this campaign are:

- *Violence against women and girls in the home must end.*
- *States are responsible for protecting women's and girls' human rights by preventing gender-based violence against them and investigating and punishing such violence.*
- *It is in our hands to stop violence against women and girls in family relationships.*

As a committee member of the Women's Affairs Committee, you have the power to make a difference for these women. If the Bill is passed, it will help to protect those women who face gender-based violence in the family.

Amnesty International urges you to strongly voice your support for the "*Domestic Violence and Other Related Matters Bill*" and to undertake a thorough public education campaign on this issue. The organisation strongly recommends that you publicly condemn violence against

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ See EUR 44/005/2005. AI Spain report: "More than words", page 1.

women: say it is never normal, legal or acceptable and that it is a human right abuse. Please remember that moves towards ending violence against women in Lagos are likely to have a major impact elsewhere in Nigeria. You are in a position to influence such a positive trend!

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.