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Mexico: Authorities don't take women's safety seriously

Thousands of Mexican women who survive violence in their homes are being put at risk of further abuse by a justice system that often fails to take their safety seriously, said Amnesty International in a new report today.

Amnesty International's report explores the obstacles Mexican women face when trying to report cases of domestic violence – including the refusal of officials to accept complaints, deficient investigations and poor enforcement of protective measures. The report is being published 18 months after Mexico passed a law to counter violence against women.

“Over a year ago, Mexico took the positive step of passing a new law to protect women from violence, but a law will not prevent women from being beaten, raped and abused unless it's implemented rigorously at the federal and state level,” said Kerrie Howard, Deputy Director for the Americas Programme at Amnesty International.

Violence against women in the home in Mexico – as in many other parts of the world -- is endemic. According to a national survey conducted in 2006, one in four women have suffered abuse at the hands of their partner and 82 per cent of women decided not to report it.

Women who find the courage to report the abuse are often treated with indifference and have to prove they are subject to violence. In many cases officials even ask them to deliver summons to their aggressor.

On 31 August 2005, Marcela's former husband broke into her house in the state of Sonora and stabbed her, leaving her paralyzed for four months. Over the years, Marcela had made over 10 complaints to the public prosecutor's office about the abuse she was suffering but every time she was advised to resolve the issue directly with her partner. One time, she was told “when you come with a bruise, we'll do something”. After the stabbing, Marcela's former husband was prosecuted for attempted murder and sentenced to 10 years but is now appealing the length of his sentence. Marcela is scared that when he is released he will find her and kill her.

“What women in Mexico need is to have their complaints of abuse taken seriously and to be able to access justice as well as effective protection mechanisms such as refuges” said Kerrie Howard.

The General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free From Violence was enacted in February 2007. Since then, many states have approved similar legislation but not yet taken concrete measures to ensure the law is properly funded and enforced.

Amnesty International is calling on Mexico's federal and state authorities to:

- Make a public commitment to prioritise the implementation of the 2007 legislation to protect women from violence and invest the necessary funds to put it into practice.
- Investigate and publish findings on why reporting, prosecution and conviction rates for violence

against women remain so low and take specific measures to tackle obstacles identified by these investigations.

A copy of the report “Women’s struggle for safety and justice: violence in the family in Mexico” will be available from Friday 1 August 2008 at 16:00 GMT on :
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR41/021/2008/en>