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## **Women in Spain: More rights, but obstacles remain**

One year ago, Spain's *Law Against Gender-based Violence* came into force. It is a positive step forward, but obstacles continue to stand in the way of a life free from violence against women.

*"I regret having filed a complaint, because my family would not have found out and I would still be in the position I am in now: alone, without any help, working like a Trojan so that my children and I can get by".*

Testimony of Laura, April 2006

One year ago, Spain's *Law Against Gender-based Violence* came into force. This law is designed to bring together in a single instrument measures to prevent violations, to assist and protect victims of violence, as well as measures to prosecute, investigate and punish any offence committed. It was a huge and positive step forward, however, a year on obstacles continue to stand in the way of a life free from violence against women.

**Women** like **Marta**, whom not even one doctor was prepared to help escape the violence after 13 years of assaults. Or **Nuria**, who fled from her husband to a safe house but could not stay there because she was from another autonomous region. Like **Maria**, who only managed to file a complaint after two days of being told "come back tomorrow", by the national police and the Guardia Civil. Or **Sonia**, who felt defenceless with a lawyer she did not know, who committed her to an agreement without her consent.

They told us their stories. **Julia** was not so lucky. During the fast-track trial she did not have a chance to show her injuries, so she was unable to obtain a restraining order. She was murdered by her husband. Nor **Susana** could tell us her story: now her desperate mother is seeking justice because no-one did anything to prevent her husband killing her.

Increasing numbers of women are reporting violent assaults and their hopes for a new life without violence must not be dashed. If the *Law Against Gender-based Violence* is to become an effective tool, resources must be allocated and measures put in place so that women's human rights can become a reality.

Violence against women is a human rights abuse, and it's the state's responsibility to assist, protect and guarantee justice to victims of domestic violence.

Help make women's rights a reality: write to the President

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to register my concern on the government's response to victims of gender-based violence, one year after the full entry into force of the *Law Against Gender-based Violence*. Amnesty International's report entitled *More rights, but obstacles remain* documents the way in which women who report violence against them and seek help, continue to have a number of obstacles to overcome.

Although the *Law Against Gender-based Violence* constitutes a step forward, the state is not responding to gender-based violence from a human rights perspective, and is failing to employ the necessary resources and take immediate action. It is essential that the Spanish government act diligently to remedy the shortcomings identified in the areas of health, assistance, policing and the courts to guarantee victims' rights.

To this end, I am asking the Spanish government to take the necessary steps to guarantee that, by 2008, the following initiatives are in place:

- A comprehensive national health programme has been set up, guaranteeing compulsory, first-rate training for all health care employees, designed to put a stop to violence in its early stages; and that the Mental Health Strategy includes measures to address gender-based violence.
- The short-term forecasts set out in the financial element of the *Law Against Gender-based Violence* have been met, there is a safe house and no victim of gender-based violence who is in need of emergency accommodation is placed in a hostel or boarding house.
- There is guaranteed access to adequate, first-rate resources for all victims of gender-based violence on an equal footing, including undocumented migrants, without discrimination of any kind.
- A programme of compulsory, first-rate training has been set up for professionals working in the specialized courts, the security forces, and for anyone involved in processing cases of gender-based violence.
- All women have legal assistance available to them free of charge from the moment they file a complaint, and throughout the judicial proceedings.

I trust that your government will do everything within its power to enforce the rights of victims of gender-based violence as they seek protection and justice.

Yours faithfully,

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Field Code

### Links

*Spain: More rights, but the obstacles remain* (in Spanish)



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Domestic violence exposed: the sixth in the series of monthly features focuses on Spain

Next month will feature **Sierra Leone**