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Russian Federation: Amnesty International and the Russian Association of Crisis Centres for Women "Stop Violence" urge the authorities to take action now

The Russian Association of Crisis Centres for Women "Stop Violence" (RACCW) and Amnesty International met last week to discuss their contribution to addressing Russia's hidden human rights abuse - violence against women in the family. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are telling to the Russian authorities: "We have expertise and concrete proposals. We urge the government to address them and we are ready to cooperate. We expect the Federal government to take action now."

NGOs such as RACCW have worked for 10 years to change the attitude of society and provide help and protection for women victims of violence.

"According to latest statistics every fifth woman in the Russian Federation is regularly beaten by her partner. We have developed strategies, created crisis centres, set up useful cooperation with police structures in different regions. Now we are ready to start working with the Federal Government," Irina Khaldeeva, President of RACCW said.

Amnesty International recognizes violence against women as a phenomenon that affects women of all backgrounds, of every class, age, ethnicity, religion and nationality all over the world - from the USA where it poses the single largest threat to all women to Bangladesh where women killed by their husbands account for 50 per cent of all murders. The organization is joining with women's organizations to convey a clear and strong message that violence against women should not be tolerated.

Despite the fact that it is now ten years since the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women made clear what governments must do, they still fail to meet their responsibility to end the problem. Those in authority must remember their duty to address the issue and support women victims of violence in the family. As recently as 2002 the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women voiced its concern about the high level of violence against women in the Russian Federation and urged the government to take urgent measures to address the problem.

Fighting violence against women is an integral part of Amnesty International's campaign on human rights in Russia. With its membership of more than 1.6 million people around the world Amnesty International is urging the government to take steps to demonstrate its political will to fulfill its obligations. In its campaign the organization is focusing on concrete steps to secure justice for women victims of violence in the family and ending impunity for perpetrators.

"In consultation with Russian NGOs we have identified areas where tangible results can be achieved and which can improve the situation for women victims of violence. Amnesty International is calling for: changes to the collection of crime statistics to clearly record and make public numbers of women reporting violence in the family; a clear message to be issued to police on how to respond to women reporting violence, and the establishment of training of police and law enforcement officials on violence against women," the organization said.

These steps should form part of a comprehensive program of action involving all necessary government bodies, nongovernmental organizations and experts, Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International and the RACCW have identified areas for cooperation including:

- Raising public awareness of violence against women as a human rights abuse.
- Encouraging dialogue with the authorities on implementing necessary measures.
- Strengthening cooperation between Amnesty International's groups and crisis centres in the Russian Federation.
- Organizing joint actions between Amnesty International's membership and the RACCW.

Combating violence against women is a huge challenge, but one that must be addressed if women are to secure their fundamental human rights in the Russian Federation, Amnesty International said. 2004 will see Amnesty International launching a campaign on violence against women all over the world. Amnesty International is committed to continue campaigning against violence against women in the family alongside Russian NGOs to ensure that these abuses are addressed and that Russian women can enjoy their basic rights and perpetrators will be punished.

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