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Venezuela

Three shelters are not enough

In Venezuela, many organizations are actively trying to change the dire situation for women in violent relationships. They are educating victims and perpetrators on the importance of seeking help, campaigning for more shelters and protection, and working with the police and judiciary to handle domestic violence cases effectively and prevent further abuses.

Until more shelters are set up in Venezuela, however, most women fleeing violence at home will find neither safety nor support. Only three domestic violence shelters currently exist in Venezuela's 336 municipalities in 24 states. This is despite the fact that the country's law on domestic violence, adopted in 1998, promotes the opening of shelters in local municipalities. The law also states that the National Institute of Women (INAMUJER) should support local municipalities to open shelters.

INAMUJER is a government agency that is responsible for formulating policies for the prevention of violence against women, as well as giving guidance to municipalities on setting up shelters. It does not have the remit to fund shelters, which is the role of municipalities.

In 2005, INAMUJER received approximately 2600 calls to its emergency helpline from women suffering violence in the family. As many thousands of women need urgent protection, it is clear that the three existing shelters cannot cope with the demands. At times, the three shelters even lack basic resources such as food, clothing and medicine.

Although the law, in theory, protects women from domestic violence in Venezuela, most women also have to face social and institutional prejudices because of the abuse to which they have been subjected.

Call to action

Write to the Minister of Popular Participation and Social Development to urgently support INAMUJER's negotiations with the municipalities to establish a minimum of one domestic violence shelter in each of the 24 states and support the three existing shelters with funding.

Sample letter

Dear Minister of Popular Participation and Social Development,

I am writing to request the immediate establishment of more shelters – Casas de Abrigo – for the protection of women victims of domestic violence, as well as financial support for the three existing shelters.

There are only three shelters in Venezuela, but there are many thousands of women suffering from domestic violence. Venezuela's 1998 law on domestic violence promotes the opening of new shelters by the 336 local municipalities. The National Institute of Women (INAMUJER) is well-equipped to give local municipalities the necessary guidance, if municipalities provide the funding to open shelters.

I urge you to support INAMUJER's negotiations with the municipalities to establish a minimum of one domestic violence shelter in each of the 24 states and support the three existing shelters with funding immediately, as a first step.

This appeal is part of Amnesty International's worldwide campaign to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November, focusing on shelters for women who suffer domestic violence.

Yours sincerely,

Target contact details

Jorge Luis García Carneiro

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