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Georgia: Strong political will needed to eradicate domestic violence

Tens of thousands of women in Georgia are hit, beaten, raped and in some cases even killed by their husbands or partners, according to a new report by Amnesty International.

"The impact of pervasive, everyday domestic violence is devastating on women, their lives, their health, their work and the well-being of their families," said Anna Sunder-Plassmann, Amnesty International's researcher on Georgia.

The report, *Georgia: Thousands suffering in silence. Violence against women in the family* outlines past government failure to protect women from further violence, to deal adequately with complaints and to initiate criminal prosecutions. At the same time it calls on the authorities to urgently and effectively implement recent legislation.

"The recent adoption of legislation on domestic violence is an important step forward. The authorities must implement it and make the eradication of domestic violence a priority in their policy on human rights," Anna Sunder-Plassmann said.

The report includes numerous testimonies of women who have survived domestic violence and who prefer to keep their anonymity for fear of reprisal and social ostracism. Their stories are a catalogue of human rights violations and an illustration of the climate of impunity in which they live.

Nino married when she was 17. Her husband forced her to give up her studies in a music school where she was learning how to play the violin. He forbade her to meet her friends, controlled her every move and never gave her money to spend. As a result of the beatings, which started soon after the marriage, Nino was taken twice to hospital. She never called the police because she was afraid that her husband would beat her more. She could not leave him because she had nowhere to go with her three children and was economically dependent on him. Nino's 20-year ordeal ended when her husband left her for another woman whom he now beats.

A very small percentage of women seek help and justice from violence. Many stay with their partners because they have nowhere else to go and lack financial independence. Complaints to the police have sometimes been left unanswered and are often followed by more beatings by their husbands or partners.

Police and medical personnel often lack the necessary training to identify, correctly register and deal with domestic violence. As a result, victims do not receive the necessary support while the perpetrators remain unpunished.

Domestic law presents a further hurdle to fighting impunity. If a woman sustains serious injuries the state is obliged to open a criminal case. However, with regard to some crimes such as "premeditated infliction of

minor damage to health" and "beatings" the state does not initiate prosecutions. The victim has to file a complaint herself in order to obtain justice. Such legislation puts victims of domestic violence at further risk as batterers often pressurize women to drop the case.

"Women should have the opportunity to file complaints but the primary onus should be on the state to initiate criminal prosecutions in cases where there is evidence that a crime has been committed. The victim of domestic violence should be requested to be a witness," Anna Sunder-Plassmann said.

Beaten at home many women -- who do not have relatives or friends who could provide them and their children with refuge -- have nowhere to go. At the moment, there are only two shelters run by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which is by far not enough.

"A network of shelters must be set up throughout Georgia as a matter of urgency. Every woman and her children should be provided with a safe space for when she decides to escape from a violent relationship," Anna Sunder-Plassman said.

"Unless women have constructive options to leave a violent relationship there is a risk that they may opt for extreme solutions such as suicide or killing their tormentor."

In May 2006 the Georgian parliament adopted the country's first ever law on domestic violence, which was drafted following extensive consultation with NGOs. It introduces a definition of domestic violence into Georgian legislation and provides a legal basis for the issuance of protection and restraint orders. It also stipulated that a national action plan on domestic violence should be approved within four months after the law's publication.

"Strong political will is needed and concerted action must be taken by the authorities to build on the positive momentum created by the adoption of the Law on Domestic Violence," Anna Sunder-Plassman said.

"Domestic violence is not inevitable and must not be accepted. It is up to the authorities in Georgia to live up to their international obligations to prevent and investigate all acts of violence against women, to hold the perpetrators accountable, and to ensure protection and reparation to the victims."

See: *Georgia: Thousands suffering in silence. Violence against women in the family*, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur560092006>

Other reports that are part of Amnesty International's Stop Violence against Women campaign include:

14-Point Programme for the Prevention of Domestic Violence: <http://web.amnesty.org/engact770122006>

Albania - Violence against Women in the Family: "It's not her shame"

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur110022006>

France: Violence against women: a matter for the State:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur210012006>

Russian Federation: Nowhere to turn to: Violence against women in the family:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur460562005>

Spain: More than words: Making protection and justice a reality for women who suffer gender based violence in the home: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur410052005>

Turkey: Women confronting family violence: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur440132004>

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