

Press Release

Violence against women in Nigeria

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Lagos (Nigeria) — Up to two-thirds of women in certain communities in Lagos State, Nigeria are believed to have experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence in the family, with neither the Lagos government nor the Federal government doing anything to stem the tide of violence - and in some cases even condoning it, said Amnesty International at a press conference today launching a new report, Nigeria: Unheard voices - violence against women in the family.

"On a daily basis, Nigerian women are beaten, raped and even murdered by members of their family for supposed transgressions, which can range from not having meals ready on time to visiting family members without their husband's permission," said Stephane Mikala, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Africa Programme. "Tragically, husbands, partners and fathers are responsible for most of the violence against these women — and the government has a duty to protect them."

In some cases, vicious acid attacks have left women with horrific disfigurements, in a brutal form of punishment known as an "acid bath". Such violence is deliberately intended to mutilate or kill - and many women subjected to an "acid bath" die as a result of the attack.

"This and other violence persist because discriminatory laws condone certain forms of violence against women," said Itoro Eze-Anaba of the Legal Defence and Assistance Project (LEDAP), who contributed to the study. "Dismissive attitudes within the police and a justice system that is difficult to access compound the failures of the state to protect women's rights."

Violence against women in the home is generally regarded as belonging to the private sphere in Nigeria, and therefore to be shielded from outside scrutiny. A culture of silence reinforces the stigma attached to the victim rather than condemning the perpetrator of such crimes.

However, women and men in Nigeria are increasingly drawing attention to injustice and discrimination against women, and asserting the rights of the women and girls who suffer violence in the home. One of their main challenges is that crimes of rape and other forms of violence in the home are seriously under-reported - with the result that perpetrators are rarely brought to justice.

"The criminal justice system in our country provides almost no protection for women from violence in the home or community," said Itoro Eze-Anaba. "The police and courts often dismiss domestic violence as a family matter and refuse to investigate or press charges. Furthermore, the few rape victims who summon up the courage to take their cases to court face humiliating rules of evidence, patronizing and discriminatory attitudes from police and court officials, and little chance of justice."

Discriminatory legislation further compounds the problem of violence against women in Nigeria. For example, under the Nigerian Criminal Code, the penalty for indecent assault against a man is higher than that for a woman:

"Any person who unlawfully and indecently assaults any male person is guilty of a felony, and is liable to imprisonment for three years." (Section 353) "Any person who unlawfully and indecently assaults a woman or girl is guilty of a misdemeanour, and is liable to imprisonment for two years." (Section 360)

Amongst Amnesty International's recommendations to the Nigerian government to tackle the problem of violence against women in the home is for authorities to:

- monitor violence against women in the home;
 - ban it in law and repeal laws that allow it to flourish;
 - end discrimination against women in the criminal justice system;
- and
- take positive measures to challenge social prejudices against women.

"The Nigerian government must take immediate action to meet its obligations under international human rights law, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, against to prevent violence against women," said Stephane Mikala.

"The courage of individual women who have spoken out about their experiences of violence has given hope to others and must be met with full support from all Nigerian authorities — including by assisting women to escape violence, securing justice for the victims, and to actively promote changes in social attitudes so as to finally bring an end to violence against women in the home."

For further information or to see a copy of the full report, please see <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engaf440042005>

P.S.

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