

# STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

## Turkey: *Shelters Not Cemeteries*

As in countries throughout the world, the human rights of thousands of women in Turkey are violated daily through violence in the family. At least a third and up to a half of all women in the country are estimated to be victims of physical violence within their families. Women should not face this violence unsupported. The state has a duty to protect women from violence committed not only by agents of the state but also by private individuals and groups.

More shelters are needed for women fleeing violent partners or families. The first step in the protection of women should be the Family Protection Law, which would distance perpetrators and allow women to stay in their own homes. However, it is recognized that in some emergency situations this is insufficient to protect women, and for such situations shelters are required.

According to a recent European Union report there should be one shelter per 10,000 head of population. Turkey, with a population of 70 million people should therefore have approximately 7,000 shelters. In reality, there are approximately 14 "guesthouses" and 19 community-based services to support women experiencing violence at home. Two independently run shelters performing invaluable services to women escaping violence and to community education, including an effective police education campaign, were closed in 1997 and 1999 due to lack of funding. There are hopes that two more will open soon,

Women in Turkey want shelters. According to one study in which 33% of women reported being beaten by their husbands, and 26% reported being beaten by their father before marriage, 91% of women stated that "in the difficult times that they encountered ill-treatment, they wanted to be able to find shelter from a social foundation." They also believed that this function was the duty of

the relevant government ministry or local administration<sup>1</sup>.

At present, the role of women's rights activists is crucial to ensure that at least a small proportion of women obtain protection - some of these organizations are the Women's Support and Solidarity Centre in Antalya, the Purple Roof Foundation in Istanbul, the Women's Centre (Ka-Mer) in Diyarbakır, the Women's Solidarity Foundations (KADAV) in Ankara and



Women from Mor Çati - the Purple Roof Foundation, Istanbul. © AI

Izmit. A worker at an NGO told Amnesty International, "Everyone sends women who have experienced violence to us. Everyone. The government, the police, everyone. We don't have the facilities to meet the demand."

Women's organizations in Turkey want shelters. They argue that, with the exception of financial audits, such centres should be run independently of government. The Purple Roof Foundation, an independent women's organization that provides support to women's groups, a news bulletin, and telephone advocacy and consulting services, told Amnesty International of some of the difficulties that women's activists are facing in Turkey. "We have reports that government-run women's shelters are turning away women who do not have their identity cards with them," said a representative. "When you are running away from a violent home, do



you think to take your identity card?"<sup>2</sup> Government-run shelters have been criticized for their failures to accept women who fall into particular categories - for example, prostitutes, women with health problems and women who are pregnant.

Turkey has an obligation under international law to ensure that women are free from violence in their homes and communities. These obligations are not limited to legislating against and criminalizing violence, but require that the state adopt a whole range of measures including the training of state personnel, and the adoption of practical policies and mechanisms to protect women's rights. These measures should include not only legal measures such as penal sanctions, civil remedies and avenues for compensation, but also preventive measures such as public information and education programs, and protective measures, including the availability of shelters and services for women who have been exposed to violence.

## ***PLEASE TAKE ACTION:***

### **Write to the *state* authorities calling for the following:**

- Take steps to prevent violence against women by funding a sufficient number of appropriate shelters in collaboration with NGOs experienced in working to protect women from violence
- Ensure that sufficient information and points of access for women to report violence, including hotlines covering all regions of Turkey staffed by sufficiently trained personnel, brochures and posters disseminated at hospitals, primary health care centres and courts, and websites, exist;
- Enforce laws that protect women, such as the Family Protection Law and the soon-to-be amended Penal Code, to ensure that violence in the family is treated as seriously as assaults in other contexts, and that rape and other forms of violence against women is criminalized in all

contexts;

- Ensure that members of the judiciary and security forces receive mandatory training to ensure that women are protected from violence in the community, and that government officials who fail to carry out their legal duty to protect women and prevent violence when clearly required to do so, are disciplined;
- Ensure that police and gendarmerie officials receive mandatory training in responding to reports of family violence immediately and effectively, and that those members of the security forces who fail to respond effectively to family violence are disciplined.

<sup>1</sup> Research conducted by the "Social and criminological research working group", of Bilgi University's Faculty of Law, presented at a seminar in Istanbul on March 26 2003

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International interview, Istanbul, 8 July 2003.

## **WRITE TO:**

**Prime Minister of Turkey**  
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### **Salutation:**

Dear Prime Minister

### **Foreign Minister and State Minister with responsibility for Human Rights**

Mr Abdullah Gül,  
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### **Salutation:**

Dear Foreign Minister