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Stop violence against women

**USA –‘If I die, I want you to tell
the world what happened to me’**

Amnesty International

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Beyond the protection of the law – violence in the family

“If I die, I want you to tell the world what happened to me. I don’t want other women to suffer as I have suffered. I want them to be listened to.”

María Teresa Macias (Teresa) had good reason to fear that her husband would kill her. In the 18 months before her death, Teresa appealed to the police more than 20 times. Her husband beat and sexually assaulted her and their three children. After Teresa fled the family home, he stalked her constantly, terrorizing her and making repeated death threats. On 15 April 1996 he shot and killed her, then shot her mother twice before turning the gun on himself.

Not once in the preceding months was Teresa’s husband arrested for flouting court orders that prohibited him from going near her or contacting her. Appeals to the police for assistance were ignored, rarely even documented, and no follow-up action was taken. Women’s rights groups investigated the case, organized legal assistance and support for Teresa’s family, and launched a national campaign.

Only after six years of legal proceedings was the Sheriff’s Department in Sonoma County, California, held to account for its failure to protect María Teresa Macias. Teresa’s family initiated a federal civil rights lawsuit, contending that she had been denied her constitutional rights by being denied equal protection under the law because she was a woman, a victim of violence in the family and a member of an ethnic minority.

In July 2000 the US Court of Appeals found that Teresa’s constitutional rights to benefit from police protection in a non-discriminatory manner had been denied, reversing an earlier ruling dismissing the case. In June 2002 the Sheriff’s Department paid Teresa’s family one million US dollars in compensation.

The precedent-setting court ruling and award were powerful reminders to law enforcement agencies throughout the USA of their legal obligation to protect women from violence. The ruling underlined the authorities’ obligations to take effective steps to prevent and punish violence against women, whoever the perpetrator.

Yet such court rulings are not enough. According to the latest government figures, there were almost 700,000 incidents of domestic violence in the USA in 2001. Around a third of women murdered each year are killed by a current or former partner. In spite of increases in national budgets and initiatives to combat violence against women – such as “family justice” centres that will integrate support services for victims of violence in the family – women like Teresa continue to suffer because they are not given the protection they need.

[pic cap]

Tribute in memory of María Teresa Macias. © Photo by Gail Blaisie, courtesy of Purple Berets

Cover photo: María Teresa Macias © Family photo, courtesy of Purple Berets

In the home and in the community, in times of war and peace, millions of women and girls are beaten, raped, mutilated and killed with impunity. Join Amnesty International's campaign to demand action by governments, communities and individuals to stop violence against women throughout the world.

Support our campaign: together we can make a difference

*** Take an interest:**

Find out and monitor how your community, government, police, security forces and courts respond to violence against women and girls.

***Take a stand:**

Speak out about violence against women. Challenge prejudiced or dismissive attitudes.

*** Take action:**

Join our global campaign for women's right to freedom from violence and discrimination.

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Take action against domestic violence in the USA

Call on President George W. Bush to:

*** increase efforts to ensure that the authorities fund and implement in all US jurisdictions the measures initiated by the federal government to combat violence against women in the Violence Against Women Act**

*** ensure that all law enforcement agencies carry out their obligation to arrest batterers, conduct immediate and exhaustive investigations of all reports of gender-based violence in the home and receive appropriate training and guidelines**

Send your appeals to: George W Bush, President, The White House, Office of the President, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington DC 20500, USA, Fax: +1 202 456 2461, E-mail: President@whitehouse.gov

Send messages of solidarity and support to:

Purple Berets–Women Defending Women, PO Box 3064, Santa Rosa, CA 95402, USA, www.purpleberets.org

Women's Justice Center/Centro de Justicia para Mujeres, 250 Sebastopol Road, Santa Rosa, CA 95407, USA, www.justicewomen.com

What you can do

- I would like to join the Stop Violence Against Women campaign. Please send me more information.**
- I would like to join Amnesty International. Please send me details.**
- I would like to make a donation to support Amnesty International's work.**

Credit card number:

Expiry date Amount
.....

NAME

Signature

ADDRESS.....

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Please send your form to the Amnesty International address in the box below, if there is one:

or to Amnesty International, International Secretariat, Peter Benenson House,

1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom

or visit Amnesty International's website at www.amnesty.org/actforwomen

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