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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR END TO  
RAPE AND SEXUAL ABUSE BY GOVERNMENT AGENTS

Amnesty International today called on governments around the world to stop one of the most demeaning human rights violations inflicted on women -- being raped or sexually abused at the hands of soldiers, police and prison guards.

In a new report released today, the human rights organization shows that women are raped or sexually abused by government agents in all regions of the world - and that even pregnant women and girls as young as 14 have been victims of this abominable treatment.

"Governments can't brush rape in custody aside as a lesser abuse or an isolated act," Amnesty International said. "When the rapist is a government agent, that rape is torture or ill-treatment and the state is responsible for it."

Yet despite repeated reports of rape, many governments persistently refuse to recognize rape as a serious human rights violation: thorough investigations are seldom held, the few perpetrators disciplined or prosecuted usually get little more than a slap on the wrist and most know they can get away with it unchallenged.

In a dramatic case in India in 1990, soldiers at a roadblock in Kashmir opened fire on a bus carrying a large family wedding party, then dragged the 18-year-old bride and her heavily pregnant aunt into a field where up to six soldiers raped them. And even though the authorities eventually admitted that the two women had been gang raped, the soldiers involved faced only the lax punishment of being suspended from duty.

"The most extraordinary thing about this rape is that it was publicly reported," Amnesty International said. "The threats of yet more violence, the social repercussions of being raped, and the apparent futility of reporting rape to the officials who condone it mean that much of this torture is never talked about."

In its report, Amnesty International said that in many countries with an armed opposition, rape has become a military tactic in counter-insurgency operations used to intimidate women. In Uganda, soldiers have raped women and girls while "screening" villagers in the search for rebels and in the Philippines women's groups have documented many cases of rape and sexual abuse of women detained during military operations. In one case, two young women had been taken to a military camp for interrogation after police found candy and cigarettes on them, which officials later claimed were provisions for rebels. Both women were sexually abused, and one apparently raped.

Some women run the risk of being raped or otherwise abused because they, like other political activists, are targets for government oppression. A Guatemalan trade unionist said she was kept naked throughout

her interrogation and threatened with gang rape if she didn't give her interrogators the information they demanded. Twelve women in Greece were picked up after police found them sticking up political posters; at the police station they were ordered to strip naked, were kept in an open room full of policemen who made obscene gestures and comments, and several were reportedly beaten.

In some cases the women are raped or sexually abused not because of their political involvement but simply to punish them because they happen to be related to men targeted by the authorities. In Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1990 some 14 girls were taken by soldiers at gunpoint to a group of huts, stripped naked, beaten and repeatedly raped -- all apparently in reprisal attacks on men involved in regional autonomy movements.

It is during interrogation that these methods, like other forms of torture or ill-treatment, are used to break people to make them confess to crimes or give information. Dozens of Palestinian women and girls detained in the Israeli-Occupied Territories have reportedly been sexually abused or threatened during questioning and in Turkey rape is one of the torture methods commonly used to extract confessions. One 20-year-old woman arrested there last May said she was repeatedly stripped, hung up by her wrists with leather straps, tortured with electric shocks on her breasts and genitals and sexually assaulted in other ways, all to get her to sign a confession.

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