

8 March 2002

AI Index ACT 77/003/2002 - News Service Nr. 42

## **Violence against women – a hidden form of human rights abuse**

*Melbourne:* “Violence against women is one of the most pervasive yet hidden forms of human rights abuse throughout the world,” Amnesty International’s Secretary General Irene Khan said today on International Women’s Day.

“In conflicts, during political instability, in state custody and in the home and community, women’s physical, mental and sexual integrity remain at risk in all regions of the world and under the rule of governments of different political persuasions.”

In Turkey, around 200 girls are killed in the name of honour every year. Judges have ruled that sentences could be reduced as the murdered woman had “provoked” the crime.

In the USA, there are continuing reports of mental, physical and sexual abuse as well as medical neglect in women’s prisons.

Military action in Afghanistan focussed world attention on the Taleban’s repression of women. Meanwhile the repression of women in nearby counties such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan remains largely unscrutinised.

“The international community has taken up the cases of some forms of violence against women but regularly fails to address others, turning a blind eye when international politics make it inconvenient, or the local situation makes it appear ‘too difficult’,” Ms Khan said.

“It highlights one of the greatest challenges facing women’s rights activists today – the fleeting, tokenistic interest that governments take in women’s human rights.”

In Australia to commemorate International Women’s Day, Ms Khan said that women fleeing violence are too often not given adequate protection.

“Women asylum seekers are more likely to have claims based on violations occurring in the “private” sphere, yet many governments do not regard gender-based violations, such as domestic violence, sexual trafficking and rape, as a basis for refugee protection.”

“Governments have a responsibility to protect women from human rights abuses both at that hands of their own officials and in the community and home.”

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