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## **Belgium Shelter in dire need of funds**

The government must make sure that Belgium's first ever shelter for women does not have to go on turning down desperate appeals for help. Women abused at the hands of partners and other family members have been able to turn to the Centre for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence in Brussels for three decades. But the Centre's valuable service is at risk.

*"In 2004, the Centre followed up over 4,800 requests for information and advice," says Myriam, who runs the Centre. "Over 200 people attended consultations, and 45 women and their children were given shelter for an equivalent of 7,300 nights."*

The Centre was set up in 1977 in the wake of publicity surrounding the "Tribunal for Crimes against Women" in Brussels, where women told their stories of abuse. Finally, the taboo on talking publicly about violence against women in Belgium had been broken.

The Centre has provided shelter and legal, social and health services to thousands of women since 1977. Its campaigns have targeted prejudice and inaction among political decision-makers, the police and judges, and frontline medical professionals.

Myriam, who works from a small office in Brussels, says: *"We do receive financial help from the authorities for the shelter. It's never enough but we cope. However, as to the advice service, we desperately need more resources. For example, we deal with more than 5000 calls a year and we only have a single telephone line."* She was trained in criminology, first working as a volunteer at the Centre and now running it with a small staff.

*"There is still a tendency to blame the victim... Women experience feelings of shame and guilt. Some suffer permanent physical or psychological harm... The problem is complex and different professionals are needed during the healing process: doctors, therapists for the woman and the children, and a strong collaboration between all those involved, including in the legal procedures, is mandatory."*

### **Call to action**

Write to the Belgian authorities urging them to ensure that the Centre for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence is provided with the funds it needs.

### **Sample letter**

Dear Minister,

The Centre for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence has done vital work in Belgium since 1977 to support women who have suffered violence in the home. It gave

support and advice to more than 5,000 people in 2005 and was able to give shelter to many women and their children. However, it desperately needs extra resources for its advice service.

Please ensure that the regional government secures regular and adequate funding for this crucial service to women by fully implementing the Decrees of 4 December 2003 and 14 July 2005 on assistance for the victims of crime.

This appeal is part of Amnesty International's worldwide campaign to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November, focusing on shelters for women who suffer domestic violence.

Yours sincerely,

**Target contact details**

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