

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Oral statement to the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women – 9 March 2005

Madam Chair,

Ten years after the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, governments last week unanimously reaffirmed their commitment to respect women's human rights and ensure gender equality. Amnesty International (AI) welcomes the full reaffirmation of the Beijing Platform for Action without watering down or undermining any of the commitments contained in it. Nevertheless, it is deeply disappointed that governments at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) – the UN body charged specifically with advancing the status of women – found themselves unable or unwilling to build on and progress efforts by governments and activists alike to protect and promote women's human rights. The Declaration adopted at the 49th session of the CSW is extremely modest in scope and adds little beyond reaffirming commitments made ten years ago. The ten year review had presented a critical opportunity to progress the women's rights agenda but sadly this has been wasted.

Last year, Amnesty International launched a six year global campaign to Stop Violence against Women to highlight the continuum of violence against women in times of war and of peace, at the hands of the state or the family. It emphasizes the need for preventative measures as well as the need to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Women face discrimination and violence at the hands of the state, the community and the family. Rape and sexual abuse, be this by relatives, security officials or armed combatants, are inflicted on millions of women and girls every year. Violence against women is not confined to any particular political or economic system, but is prevalent in every society in the world and cuts across boundaries of wealth, race and culture.

The underlying cause of violence against women lies in the discrimination that denies women equality of rights with men. In some countries, the state enforces gender-based violence against women and discrimination is written into the law; in others the laws are inadequate; and even where the laws are not discriminatory, the practices of government authorities, agencies, police and prosecutors often foster discrimination and violence against women.

Some women are at particular risk of violence by virtue of a multiplicity of factors including discrimination based not only on gender, but also on race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation or identity, health, age or physical or mental ability. These dimensions of discrimination intersect, forcing many women into situations of multiple marginalization.

Amnesty International salutes the efforts of the women's movement to promote women's human rights and through our campaign we seek to complement and contribute to their efforts.

Amnesty International places the fight against gender-based violence within the human rights framework, and emphasizes the obligation of governments to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish all acts of violence against women. Women have the right to

have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

Ending violence against women – and the fulfillment of women’s rights as a whole – requires much more concerted action by governments. As the CSW session draws to a close Amnesty International urges all states to commit to ensure the accelerated implementation of the Beijing commitments, including by allocating adequate resources, to guarantee the full protection of women’s human rights. Amnesty International also requests that governments ensure that these commitments are fully integrated into preparation for, proceedings and outcome of the Millennium Summit in September.

For more information please call Amnesty International's International Secretariat

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