

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**  
Commissioner for External Relations and  
European Neighbourhood Policy

Brussels, 1 December 2008  
Our ref.: B833

Dear Ms Ferrero-Waldner,

**Subject: EU-Armenia Association Council, 8 December 2008**  
**Domestic and sexual violence in Armenia**

In view of the upcoming EU-Armenia Association Council on 8 December, Amnesty International would like to draw your attention to our concerns regarding violence against women in Armenia, which we urge you to raise with your Armenian counterparts.

As you will note from our attached report *No Pride in Silence: Countering Violence in the Family in Armenia*, Amnesty International has welcomed initial steps taken by the Armenian government towards addressing violence against women. In 2004 national action plans were adopted to eliminate trafficking in persons and to enhance the role of women in society. A draft law criminalizing domestic violence was under discussion by the working group representing government officials, legal experts and women's non-governmental organizations during 2008. Police training programmes have been initiated to implement guidelines for police responsibilities in responding to domestic violence.

However, we are concerned that current legislation, mechanisms and procedures fail to provide survivors of domestic violence with access either to justice or to the health, legal and social services necessary. The enclosed report indicates that such survivors in Armenia are failed by a criminal justice system that urges them to reconcile with their abusers and allows impunity for the perpetrators of violence against women. There is a need to prioritize implementation of legislative, institutional and public education strategies aimed at fulfilling international obligations to eliminate violence against women, including domestic and sexual violence. Through the introduction of a range of measures to prevent such acts; the adoption and implementation of laws which criminalize such acts and ensuring the provision of services to victims; and increasing the public awareness of violence against women as a widespread criminal offense and human rights violation this can be achieved.

Amnesty International urges the European Commission to seize the opportunity of the EU-Armenia Association Council to press the Armenian authorities to prioritize the elimination of domestic violence and stress the need for Armenia's compliance with obligations under international human rights law. Armenia can fulfill these international obligations by taking the following actions:

- Criminalize domestic violence, facilitate its prevention and the provision of support to victims. It is necessary to criminalize violence against women in the family, including psychological abuse, beating, rape (including marital rape), sexual assault and other gender-based violence.
- Ensure that victims of domestic and sexual violence have access to the criminal justice system, without facing pressure to withdraw complaints or 'reconcile' with their abuser, and ensure that crimes of domestic or sexual violence are treated with the same seriousness as violence in other contexts.
- Establish a governmental body to combat domestic violence, sexual assault and sexual harassment and to co-ordinate the efforts of different government agencies in this field. This body must have sufficient authority and resources in order to discharge its duties effectively.
- Ensure access for victims of domestic and sexual violence to support services through a nationwide network of crisis centres and shelters offering advice and protection.

- Establish an effective cross-referral system engaging different agencies encountering domestic and sexual violence, including police, health workers, legal aid centres, shelters and crisis centres.
- Introduce a range of measures raising awareness of family violence as a crime and human rights violation. We must challenge those who defend the continued practice of violence against women.

We look forward to hearing from you with regards to the outcome of the Association Council.

Yours sincerely,



Nicolas Beger  
Director  
Amnesty International EU Office

You can access the Amnesty International report *No Pride in Silence: Countering Violence in the Family in Armenia* (AI Index: EUR 54/004/2008, issued 1 October 2008 through the following link:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR54/004/2008/en/ec863cc6-a049-11dd-81c4-792550e655ec/eur540042008en.pdf>