

14-Point Programme for the Prevention of Domestic Violence

Violence against women in the family – domestic violence – is a fundamental violation of human rights. It is a pervasive, daily reality for women living in every country across the globe. Its impact is devastating on women, their lives, their health, their work and the wellbeing of their families.

Amnesty International calls on all governments to implement this 14-Point Programme for the Prevention of Domestic Violence. They should act immediately to confront domestic violence, prevent its recurrence and move towards eradicating it totally.

Amnesty International invites concerned individuals and organizations to use their influence to ensure that governments implement this Programme.

The recommendations in the 14-Point Programme for the Prevention of Domestic Violence are interrelated, and they are all important in addressing domestic violence. All of them embody these basic principles:

- The goal of any action must be to ensure women's safety, protection and autonomy, as well as their physical, mental and social wellbeing in the aftermath of suffering abuse.
- Government policies, practices and laws must not discriminate against women, on grounds of gender, or of age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, class, language, cultural or religious beliefs, marital, maternal or citizenship status, or place of residence.
- Governments should consult and work closely with women victims and survivors, and with non-governmental organizations that have experience in addressing domestic violence.

All governments should:

1. Condemn domestic violence

State officials and political leaders at every level, national, district and local, should publicly and consistently condemn domestic violence, highlighting its gravity. They should acknowledge that domestic violence is a human rights violation, and therefore a public concern, not a private matter. Officials may not invoke customs, traditions or religion to evade their responsibility to eliminate violence against women.

2. Raise public awareness of domestic violence

Widespread public awareness campaigns should be launched in schools, colleges, citizens' forums and workplaces to denounce domestic violence, to remove the stigma from women targeted for violence, and to encourage survivors to seek redress. All available media should be used, including the press, the Internet, lectures and debates, and the campaigns should involve community leaders, municipal politicians, journalists and civil society. All information should be easily accessible and available in local languages.

3. Use the education system to challenge prejudice

Educational materials should be developed and incorporated into curriculums at all levels of the education system, aimed at preventing domestic violence and challenging ideas that regard domestic violence as acceptable. Teachers, lecturers and other education workers should be part of the effort to overcome prejudices and stereotypes that confine women and girls to subordinate roles and contribute to domestic violence.

4. Abolish legislation that discriminates against women

All laws, including criminal, civil, family and housing laws, should be reviewed to ensure that they comply with human rights principles. Any laws, regulations, or procedures that discriminate against women or that allow such discrimination to persist should be reformed, as well as any laws that facilitate or perpetuate violence against women. New legislation should be adopted as appropriate with the aim of ensuring equality for women.

5. Ensure that domestic violence is a criminal offence

Ensure that all forms of domestic violence are treated in law and practice as human rights violations and criminal offences, that acts of domestic violence are investigated, prosecuted and punished in accordance with the gravity of the crime, and that victims receive appropriate reparations. No matter where in a country a woman lives, her complaint should be pursued with equal determination and thoroughness.

6. Investigate and prosecute complaints of domestic violence

Ensure that the police provide a safe and confidential environment for women to report domestic violence, that there is mandatory registration of all complaints of domestic violence, and that all such complaints are promptly, impartially and effectively investigated. When there is sufficient admissible evidence, suspects should be prosecuted in accordance with international standards for fair trial and without recourse to the death penalty or corporal punishment, while ensuring that sentences are commensurate with the gravity of the crime. If a case is dropped, the reasons should be made public.

7. Remove obstacles to prosecutions for domestic violence

Investigate why reporting, prosecution and conviction rates for domestic violence are so low, and tackle obstacles and shortcomings identified by these investigations. Court procedures and rules of evidence should be reformed so that they do not discourage women from pursuing complaints. Complainants, witnesses and others at risk during investigations and prosecutions should be protected from intimidation, coercion and reprisals. There should be close co-operation between the police, the prosecution authorities and other authorities and services at the local level.

8. Provide compulsory training on domestic violence for officials

Fund and implement compulsory training programmes for officials – including police, lawyers, judges, forensic and medical personnel, social workers, immigration officials and teachers – in how to identify cases of domestic violence, how to ensure the safety of survivors and how to collect, safeguard, consider and present evidence.

9. Provide adequate funding

Allocate adequate funding to programmes to address domestic violence in all sectors including the criminal justice system, education, social services, health and housing, for example through a National Action Plan to ensure that assistance is equally available and of comparable quality throughout the country. Funding should be sufficient to allow the implementation of legislation protecting women from domestic violence, and to provide necessary support and rehabilitation measures for survivors.

10. Provide places of safety for women fleeing violence

Fund and establish sufficient temporary shelters or other places of safety for women, without compromising their privacy, personal autonomy and freedom of movement. Such places should support and assist women's physical and mental recovery, and help them to access suitable, safe housing in the longer term.

11. Provide support services for women

Fund and create services for women who have suffered domestic violence, in co-operation with civil society organizations as appropriate, so that they can access the criminal and civil justice systems, including free legal advice when necessary on divorce, child custody and inheritance. Ensure that they have access to adequately funded health-care and support services, including counselling. Services should be linguistically and culturally accessible to all women requiring them.

12. Reduce the risks of armed violence

Remove all firearms from homes where incidents of domestic violence have been reported. Ensure that health and social workers include questions on the possession of guns in all demographic, health and social services surveys.

13. Collect and publish data on domestic violence

Ensure that domestic violence is fully reflected in official reports and statistics, that the collection of qualitative and quantitative data is standardized and disaggregated according to gender and other relevant factors, and that it is open to verification. Ensure that all relevant government departments collect and publish data and statistics on domestic violence, that they share data, and that the data is used by policy-makers in devising effective policies and programmes to address domestic violence.

14. Let women know what they are entitled to

Ensure that women suffering violence have access to information about their rights and the services and support they are entitled to. Police stations, health facilities and other state agencies should be required to publicize information about victims' rights, including the range of protection measures available. All relevant agencies should be required to draw up, implement and monitor guidelines and procedures covering every stage of their response to cases of domestic violence, specifying what action is to be taken if these standards are not met.

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