



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/HRC/4/34/Add.2
5 January 2007

Original: ENGLISH

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
Fourth session
Item 2 of the provisional agenda

**IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 60/251
OF 15 MARCH 2006 ENTITLED “HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL”**

**Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women,
its causes and consequences, Yakin Ertürk**

Addendum

MISSION TO TURKEY*

* The summary of this mission report is being circulated in all official languages. The report itself is contained in the annex to the summary and is being circulated in the language of submission only.

Summary

This report contains my findings as Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, following my official mission in Turkey from 22 to 31 May 2006. It addresses suicides of women in eastern and south-eastern Turkey and the claims that the deaths of these women may be instances of murder or forced suicides. Accordingly, the report has a limited geographic and substantive scope.

Despite the recognition of equality between women and men as an integral component of Turkey's modernization project and the adoption of legal and institutional measures towards this end at the creation of the Republic, the basic development indicators for women today are bleak and violence against them all too pervasive. The situation of women in the eastern regions is particularly worrisome. Their limited access to education, employment, information, health services and justice are major constraints on their citizenship rights, their ability to negotiate the terms of their existence and to obtain redress for their problems.

Honour (*namus*) is an important value in Turkish society; it serves to reproduce the rigid control exercised over women and their sexuality. Honour is particularly important in the region, as the norm is codified into customary law (*töre*). Accordingly, the family must ensure that the code of honour is observed by its members as transgressions (or mere rumours of such transgressions) are seen as "stains" on the entire family. These stains may have to be cleansed at any cost, if necessary through murder.

The suicides occurring in the south-eastern/eastern region are intimately linked to violence emanating from the understandings of *namus* and *töre*. There are reasonable grounds to assume that some of the recorded suicide cases are indeed disguised murders. In other cases, family members appear to have instigated the suicide. While the officials indicate that every case of suicide is thoroughly investigated and that the necessary forensic investigations are undertaken, more must be done to identify and resolve cases involving criminal responsibility.

On 1 June 2005, groundbreaking reforms to the Turkish Penal Code entered into force, successfully removing the most obvious patriarchal biases from the law. Despite these advances in the legislative framework, many problems persist in their actual implementation, including lack of sufficient protective mechanisms for women such as shelters.

In view of the existing challenges, I call on the Government of Turkey to ensure women's advancement; strengthen the legal and institutional framework; implement a zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of violence against women; identify and adjudicate cases of forced suicide and disguised murders; protect women at risk of violence; improve the database on violence against women; and take additional suicide-prevention measures. I urge the media, in collaboration with other civil society actors, to challenge gender stereotypes, to show sensitivity when reporting on suicides and not sensationalize such events. I recommend that civil society document and disseminate information on violence against women. I appeal to the international community to support the initiatives of local women's groups, research institutes and academia and the United Nations country team in their work on the promotion and protection of women's human rights.

Annex

**REPORT OF THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN, ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES**

Mission to Turkey

(22-31 May 2006)

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. At the invitation of the Government, I undertook an official fact-finding mission in Turkey in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. The mission was motivated by media reports about rising rates of suicides among women (and girls) in south-eastern and eastern Turkey (henceforth referred to as “the south-eastern/eastern region”). I was particularly concerned about allegations that the deaths of these women were in fact either instances of murder or the victims were forced to commit suicide. Accordingly, this report has a limited scope in terms of geography and substance. It focuses solely on issues related to violence against women in the region and in Turkey, to the extent that I have found it to be linked to suicides of women.

2. The mission, which took place from 22 to 31 May 2006, was well received by the Government. I had access to the authorities with whom I had requested to meet in the provinces and in the capital, including the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Justice, the State Minister for Women, Family and Children, as well as members of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Honour Killings. I would like to thank the Government of Turkey for its cooperation.

3. Following initial consultations with national authorities and non-governmental organizations in Ankara, I visited the provinces of Batman and Şanlıurfa in South-eastern Anatolia, and Van in Eastern Anatolia. I met with local officials and representatives of non-governmental organizations, who provided me with valuable information and insights. Furthermore, I spoke with the families of suicide victims and with women who survived suicide attempts. I would like to express my special gratitude to these families and women for having the courage and strength to talk to me about the very personal tragedies they experienced. I would also like to applaud the local women’s groups for courageously responding to violence against women.

4. The report starts with a brief discussion of the context in which the main parameters of the status of women in the region are determined and continues with a general overview of the manifestations of violence, analysis of suicides and an assessment of responses to the problem by the State and non-State actors. Finally, in the conclusions and recommendations, I call for a holistic strategy to prevent and respond to violence against women, with a particular focus on suicides, and make specific recommendations to the Government and other relevant actors.

II. THE MODERNIZATION PROCESS

A. Regional specificities

5. Turkey is located at the crossroads of two continents and many civilizations. It emerged as a unitary, secular national State by breaking from the multinational, Islamic Ottoman Empire following a war of independence fought against the Sultanate and Western powers after the First World War. This transition carried with it elements of continuity and discontinuity, unity and diversity, tradition and modernity, which form the basis of political competition and identity politics today.

6. The elements of continuity from the Ottoman period to the republican era are engrained in what has been referred to as “corporate identity”, which incorporated both religion and political power within State authority and historically facilitated the sustenance of a centralized political order. Within this context, tendency towards diversity in public discourse was discouraged.¹
7. The restructuring of the relationship between State, community and the individual on the basis of citizenship rather than communal group membership entailed a divergence from the Ottoman legal/institutional order. At this juncture, the foundation for tension between the State and civil society was laid. While religion was used to unify diverse ethno-linguistic groups, at the same time, in accordance with secular principles, it was excluded from the representation of identity in the public sphere. Similarly, the unitary character of the State was defined in terms of a homogenous nation.
8. The south-eastern/eastern region, populated mainly by citizens of Kurdish origin, has historically been characterized by its feudal structure and relative autonomy. An individual’s status and social relationships were determined by their lineage and tribal affiliation. The economic basis of this socio-political structure was rooted in a skewed distribution of land. Most arable land was owned by large landowners called *ağas*, who commanded extensive authority over rural life and served as the primary arbiters of conflict within their communities. While women held a subordinate position within this traditional patriarchal system, their differential status depended on their lineage, on their bearing sons and on ensuring the appropriate conduct of daughters and brides in the household.² Patriarchal control was upheld and property and collective identity were preserved through endogamy, particularly paternal cousin marriages.
9. Although the *ağa* system suffered with the creation of the Republic, feudal relations continued in the region. With the entry into the multiparty system in 1946 and the adoption of agricultural modernization policies, the old *ağa* class became integrated into the national system. Within this context, some landlords were able to capitalize on these new opportunities, thereby accumulating more land and political power while others became marginalized. The small and tenant farmers who could not access capital-intensive agriculture either became dependent on the modern *ağa* class as sharecroppers or sold their plots and migrated to other parts of the country.
10. The impact of these trends on regional integration was contradictory. On the one hand, as the modernized *ağa* system became an important element of alliances with political parties

¹ Y. Ertürk, 2006, “Turkey’s modern paradoxes: identity politics, women’s agency, and universal rights”, in Ferree and Tripp (eds.), *Global Feminism: Transnational Women’s Activism, Organizing, and Human Rights*, New York, NYU Press, 2006, pp. 79-109.

² Cf. D. Kandiyoti, 1988, “Bargaining with patriarchy”, *Gender and Society* 2 (3), pp. 274-290.

and successive Governments, the structure of traditional relations strengthened in the region. On the other hand, the exodus to big cities triggered by rural transformations fractured the basis of these relationships, thus allowing for alternative space for individuals.³

11. Among the three provinces I visited, the tribal system, albeit transformed, is most visible in Şanlıurfa, where a majority of inhabitants still identify themselves as members of a specific tribe. To some extent, the strength of the tribal structure results from the strong agricultural base of the province. Some *ağas* have integrated into urban structures through which traditional loyalties are sustained. Politics have also helped to keep tribal ties alive. Interlocutors have explained that politicians and administrators have often been inclined to accommodate themselves to local power structures and seek the *ağas'* political support in exchange for non-interference in matters regarded as internal, which invariably entail matters related to women. More often than not, individuals from the *ağa* families themselves join the ranks of central political power.

12. In Batman tribal bonds remain influential but are considerably looser, particularly in urban areas. The discovery of oil in the province in 1952 led to an economic boom, which triggered migration from other parts of the country and diversified the composition of the local population. During the conflicts in the 1980s, Batman also saw a massive influx of displaced persons. Van has seen similar patterns of urbanization and displacement, which have weakened but certainly not eroded the local tribal structure. Its location as a border city has made Van particularly volatile during the conflicts resulting in mass economic and physical displacements.

B. Regional gaps in women's emancipation

13. The "women question" formed one of the central issues that both framed and challenged Turkish modernization. The modernizing elites emphasized that the road to progress must include both sexes, and equality between women and men was given constitutional and statutory recognition. However, modernization was mediated mainly through male-dominated institutions. Consequently, despite many gains and the integration of some women into modernization, the gender order remained intact. Furthermore, the vast majority of women in rural areas and in the eastern provinces remained marginal to the process. Regional and rural-urban disparities became the salient feature of Turkey's experience in development in general and in women's emancipation in particular.

14. Regional inequality has significantly curtailed the availability of educational and employment opportunities in the south-eastern/eastern region. Economic deprivation, coupled with sociocultural deprivation emanating from traditional patriarchal practices, put the burden of regional underdevelopment disproportionately on the shoulders of women in this region.

³ Analysts agree that this process has both been the basis of integration and the emergence of ethnicity-based politics in Turkey. The situation became aggravated when in 1984 the illegal Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) entered the stage and launched a series of attacks and ambushes on security forces and other targets in the region. The violence continued until 1997, when the armed forces contained the situation. The recent PKK attacks in various parts of the country are raising concerns that the violence of the past may be resurfacing.

According to the 2001 United Nations Development Programme National Human Development Report, for Turkey, provinces in the region rank among the lowest in the country on both the Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). Out of 79 provinces measured, Batman ranked 70th in GDI and 63rd in GEM (out of 73). The figures for Şanlıurfa are 72nd and 65th and for Van 74th and 67th, respectively.⁴

15. The regional disparity in women's education is particularly alarming. While the average illiteracy rate for men in Turkey is 6.1 per cent and the average for women is 19.4 per cent, the rates for the south-eastern/eastern region are 12 and 35 per cent, respectively (population census 2000). In rural areas of the region almost half of all women are illiterate. Considering that the majority of these women may also be non-Turkish speakers, their exclusion from mainstream society becomes striking. This is an indicator of gross failure on the part of the successive Governments since the creation of the Republic in addressing the problems of women in the region.

16. In 1997, with the adoption of a new Basic Education Law (No. 4306), the five-year period of compulsory schooling was increased to eight years. In 2003, six years after the adoption of the law, it was still estimated that one in eight girls had either never been sent to school or dropped out during the second phase of mandatory primary education (grades 6-8), when girls reach puberty. In Şanlıurfa and Van, for instance, almost one third of all girls were not enrolled in primary education.⁵ It is disappointing that the State spends a meagre 3.46 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on educational institutions.⁶

17. The Ministry of National Education and UNICEF launched the Campaign *Haydi Kızlar Okula* ("Let's go to school, girls!"), which focused mainly on the south-eastern/eastern region. According to UNICEF, the campaign has resulted in the enrolment of some 177,000 girls and 87,000 boys, considerably less than the target set. Only 5 out of 33 participating provinces recorded a positive and statistically significant change in the gender gap in education.⁷ There are, of course, also praiseworthy examples of authorities engaging with local communities. The Şanlıurfa Security Directorate for instance, has convinced the parents of over 100,000 girls and boys from socio-economically marginalized backgrounds to attend weekend lessons on responsible social and civic behaviour.

18. The political situation referred to above poses a further constraint on the education of girls specifically and the emancipation of women in general. In its attacks, the PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party) has often targeted central State institutions such as schools and health centres,

⁴ Turkey's GDI rank globally is 70 and the GEM rank is 76 (UNDP Human Development Index 2005).

⁵ UNICEF/Government of Turkey, 2003, "Quality of life indicators by provinces".

⁶ Ertürk and Dayıoğlu, 2004, *Gender, Education and Child Labour in Turkey*, Geneva, ILO.

⁷ Ş. Büyüköztürk, 2005, "Haydi Kızlar Okula" Girls Education Campaign: Quantitative Evaluation Study - Final Report.

which has meant no schooling for many children in the region. Generally, education has been a subject of contention. Since Turkish is the medium of education in schools, some local leaders justify not sending girls to school by arguing that these girls would assimilate and lose their Kurdish language and identity. Remarkably, the same argument is not made with regard to boys, whose education in mainstream institutions seems - as evidenced by their much higher schooling rates - to be praised.

III. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

A. Multiple patriarchal demands

19. Honour (*namus*) is an important value in Turkish society; it serves to reproduce the rigid control exercised over women and their sexuality. For women, compliance with the code of honour can range from having to dress and act with “modesty”, to observing chastity prior to marriage, to accepting arranged marriages and not leaving the house without the consent and/or accompaniment of an older relative. In the region, honour is particularly important as the norm is codified into customary law, which is referred to as *töre* (custom or law). According to *töre*, the family must ensure that the code of honour is observed by its members as transgressions (or mere rumours of such transgressions) are seen as “stains” on the entire family. These stains may have to be cleansed at any cost, if necessary through murder.

20. Ties based on collective relationships reinforce and harden the *namus* ideology, as it is presented as part and parcel of the collective identity. Women and their immediate families are locked into the normative order of *töre*. *Töre* is all-encompassing: it regulates the moral order not only of women but also men - the safekeepers of that order - and the relationship among them. The observance of honour therefore becomes a societal concern.

21. Tribal connections extend the reach of *töre* and make it harder for women to escape violence. Illustrative is the case of an 18-year-old woman who sought the protection of the Social Service Office in Şanlıurfa in 1997. Although armed family members demanded her return to the family, she was sent to a shelter in Ankara. A government minister from Şanlıurfa helped the family (perhaps in good faith) to locate her. The family then came to the shelter and promised not to harm the woman if she would marry a cousin. She agreed, and the marriage was performed. Six months after the woman returned to Şanlıurfa, she was murdered by her father.

22. In previous reports I have argued that gender inequality becomes more pronounced in conflict and crisis situations as competing masculine discourses place contradictory demands on women, and conflict is instrumentalized as a pretext to further entrench patriarchal control. This also appears to be the case for women in the region. Aside from the overall tensions experienced, women became directly involved as they have been recruited into the ranks of the PKK as combatants and suicide bombers, thus putting them at odds with the security forces as suspects of terrorist acts.

23. The link between ethnic identity politics and girls’ education and the dispute between political Islam and the secular State over the ban on the headscarf in public sector jobs and universities are other examples of clashing values where women bear the consequences.

B. Diverse manifestations of violence

24. There are no comprehensive statistics on gender-based violence in Turkey. The few available studies indicate that most violence against women occurs in the domestic sphere and it pervades all social and educational levels. A survey of 1,259 women conducted between 1990 and 1996 showed that 88.2 per cent lived in an environment of violence and 68 per cent were hit by their husbands.⁸ A 1995 survey among women living in squatter housing in Ankara indicated that 97 per cent were assaulted by their husbands.⁹ Another survey of middle- and upper-income families conducted one year later indicated that 23 per cent of women reported that their husbands were violent towards them; when questioned about specific types of violence, this figure rose to 71 per cent.¹⁰

25. Domestic violence continues to be perceived as a normal aspect of family life, including by women themselves. The 2003 Turkish Demographic and Health Survey asked a sample of women whether a husband would be justified in beating his wife if she burned the food, if she argued with him, if she spent too much money, if she neglected the children or if she refused to have sex with him. Overall, 39.2 per cent of women accepted at least one of these reasons as a justification for wife beating. The figure was even higher for South-eastern Anatolia (50.6 per cent) and Eastern Anatolia (45.9 per cent).¹¹

26. Few incidents of domestic violence are ever reported, as the reporting of such matters is regarded as a dishonourable act in itself that may lead to honour retribution against the woman reporting.

27. While social norms are gradually changing, arranged and early marriages are still very frequent in the south-eastern/eastern region. It is not uncommon that marriages are arranged between paternal cousins in order to foster family ties and ensure that property stays in the family. Less common, but still practised, is *berdel*, the exchange of brides between two families. Families sometimes resort to *berdel* to settle long-standing disputes. In other cases it is perceived as a convenient method to offset costly dowry payments.

28. The Civil Code sets the legal age of marriage for men and women at 17 years, but with the special permission of a judge, a boy or girl can marry at the age of 16. Religious marriages are not legally recognized. In practice, these norms are regularly breached, particularly in the region's rural areas and poorer urban neighbourhoods. Unless a complaint is filed, the

⁸ Mor Çatı Shelter Foundation, 1997, *Geleceğim Elimde*.

⁹ Amnesty International, 2004, Turkey: *Women confronting family violence*.

¹⁰ *Idem*.

¹¹ Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, 2003, *Turkey Demographic and Health Survey*, p. 33.

authorities rarely investigate such cases. Instead, a number of provincial governors are encouraging (and tacitly pressuring) couples who only have a religious ceremony to enter a civil marriage so that the women can benefit from the provisions of the law.

29. The incidence of forced marriages is difficult to assess since the boundary between arranged and forced marriages is very fluid and cases involving outright violence are rare. According to reports, it is more common that intense psychological pressure, veiled threats and, if necessary, complete social isolation are used to subdue a woman who refuses to marry the groom chosen by her family. A transnational dimension of the problem has also become increasingly visible as some girls whose families migrated from Turkey to other countries have been forced to marry men in Turkey.

C. The particularism of murders in the name of honour

30. Murders of women in the name of honour have been a subject of intensive public debate in Turkey for the past decade. While there is no systematic data on these murders, non-governmental organizations document dozens of cases every year in which women (and sometimes also the man involved) are murdered for allegedly dishonourable behaviour.

31. A 2005 survey conducted among 336 men and 94 women from South-eastern Anatolia by Prof. Aytekin Sir of Dicle University showed that 37.4 per cent of all respondents believed that murder was justified if a wife had committed adultery. The General Directorate of Security recently conducted a most commendable survey of 1,091 *töre* murders that were committed in urban districts under police jurisdiction between 2000 and 2006: 480 of the total 1,190 victims were women; 710 were men. Nearly one third of the murders were categorized as honour-related, another third concerned intrafamily conflict, 10 per cent were blood feuds and the remaining cases involved rape, disputes over marriage arrangements, etc. The study also showed that while the vast majority of the murders were committed in areas which receive high levels of migration (such as Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir), the birthplace of 50 per cent of the suspects and victims was an eastern province.

32. What distinguishes honour-related killings from other forms of violence against women is the way they are organized and executed. A family council, which may also include members of the extended kin, decides upon and organizes the murder. A young man or boy is often assigned to commit the crime because it is hoped that the young offender will receive a more lenient sentence. Such murders are often presented as acts of retribution against a woman who supposedly committed an act of grave immorality. However, the demonstrative manner in which they are carried out reveals that they serve mainly to terrorize women as a group in order to uphold patriarchal privilege. Furthermore, they often result from mere rumours and gossip about the presumed misconduct of a woman. Actual proof of the “dishonourable act” is irrelevant, because what is at stake is the public perception of a transgression, and the challenge this entails for the family’s social standing.

33. Public attention to honour crimes became particularly pronounced during the Criminal Code reform process, which resulted in an amendment prescribing mandatory life sentences for *töre* murders (see paragraph 56 below). On 18 May 2005, the Turkish National Assembly

created a Commission of Inquiry on honour killings and violence against women and children in general. The Commission carried out an extensive study and presented its findings to the Parliament.

IV. SUICIDES OF WOMEN IN THE REGION

A. Analysis of available data

34. Turkey has comparatively low suicide rates. According to an estimate by the World Health Organization (WHO), the overall global suicide rate is about 16 per 100,000 persons.¹² Turkish Statistical Institute data from 2003 indicates that the national suicide rate was only 3.83 per 100,000 persons. The suicide rate is highest in the Aegean region (6.98) and it is 2.87 for South-eastern Anatolia and 3.73 for Eastern Anatolia regions. Batman, which some journalists have labelled “Suicide City” after the suicide of five women and two men in the first five months of 2006 (two more suicides of women have been reported since my mission), saw 105 suicides in the period between 2000 and 2005. This corresponds to an annual suicide rate of about 3.5 per 100,000 persons, which is slightly lower than the national average for 2003.

35. However, what is of concern about the suicides in Batman and several other provinces in the south-eastern/eastern region is the anomalous sex ratio of the victims. Worldwide, more men than women commit suicide. The world male/female suicide ratio is roughly 3.5 men to 1 woman. Approximately 26 out of 100,000 men commit suicide each year, whereas this figure for women is only about 7 per 100,000. For Turkey, the male/female suicide ratio is about 1.5 to 1, similar to many other developing countries.¹³

36. However, in several provinces in the south-eastern/eastern region, including Batman and Van, the trend is markedly different from global and national trends. The male/female suicide ratio for the south-eastern/eastern region stands at 0.97 to 1 - that is to say, more women than men commit suicide.¹⁴ Furthermore, it is noteworthy that many of the suicide victims in Turkey

¹² See www.who.int/entity/mental_health/management/en/SUPRE_flyer1.pdf. These figures are rough estimates based on available data from about half of the world's countries.

¹³ China is the only country which reports higher suicide rates among women. Available data suggests that, globally, women attempt suicide more often than men.

¹⁴ See 2003 figures of the Turkish Statistical Institute. For the three provinces I visited, the official figures are as follows: between 2001 and May 2006, there were 82 suicides in Batman (38 men, 44 women) and 439 attempted suicides (133 men, 306 women) were recorded. During the same period, there were 326 suicides (211 men, 115 women) in Şanlıurfa. In addition, 581 suicide attempts were recorded, but the data was not disaggregated by sex. The Government also informed me that 86 suicides (51 men, 35 women) occurred in Van between 2001 and May 2006. In addition, there were 362 attempted suicides (147 male, 215 female). The Van figures appear to be incorrect given that the 2003 official statistics note 40 female suicides for Van in that year alone. Statistics on suicides in rural districts of Van, which I directly obtained from the Van Gendarmerie Command, noted 69 suicides of women and 60 male suicides between 2001 and May 2006. There are also other provinces with decidedly more suicides of

were young women and men aged 15 to 29. In 2003, 62 per cent of female suicide victims were younger than 30 years old, and 37 per cent were in the 15 to 25 age group. Very often the victims come from poor families with rural backgrounds.

B. Underlying reasons for women's suicides

37. Owing to these statistical anomalies, there has been intense debate about the reasons behind the suicides of women. Media and non-governmental organizations have expressed concern that many suicides could indeed be honour crimes, with the family either forcing the victim to commit suicide or successfully disguising murder as suicide. Some observers have speculated that higher penalties for customary killings under the reformed Penal Code may have motivated many families to disguise honour murders as suicides.

1. Cases involving criminal responsibility

38. There are reasonable grounds to assume that some of the recorded suicide cases are indeed disguised murders. In other cases, family members appear to have instigated the suicide, an act criminalized by article 84 of the Turkish Penal Code. Many senior justice and law enforcement officials in the provinces share this view and have related to me a number of suspicious cases of suicides or "accidental" deaths of women which may in fact have been murder. Some of these cases have been referred to the courts for prosecution and at least one has reportedly resulted in a conviction.

39. Elife Atlihan of Kahramanmaraş became pregnant after being raped by her cousin at age 15. After he denied the accusation before a family gathering, she was handed a rope by her mother and told to cleanse her honour. Her brother, who was ordered to ensure that she committed suicide, helped her set the chair at the right height and left the room. On 1 March 2003 the court convicted the brother and the mother of murder and sentenced them to life imprisonment. The rapist was also convicted.

40. Article 51 of the Penal Code in force at the time, which allowed for a reduced sentence on the grounds of grave provocation, was not applied to the case as the court followed the prosecutor's view that the Constitution's equality clause prohibited a reduced sentence on *namus* or *töre* grounds since the victim was raped and impregnated. This case shows that a human rights-sensitive approach by judicial decision makers can compensate for deficiencies in the law itself and underlines the importance of human rights and gender-sensitivity training for professionals.

41. Another case, which may have involved a forced suicide, decided by the First Aggravated Felony Court in Van, concerned a 17-year-old married woman named Sevgül. In 1999, her family had arranged her marriage in return for bride money. Since she was not of legal age, the

women than men. A most striking example is Muğla in the Aegean region, with 104 female suicides as opposed to 42 male in 2003. Since I have not visited these provinces, I cannot draw any parallels to the situation in the south-eastern/eastern region.

marriage was performed only by religious ceremony. In May 2002, Sevgül was found hanged. Witnesses testified that she had had a heated argument with her husband on the day of her death and forensic evidence proved that she had been severely beaten shortly before her death. The husband was charged with murder but eventually acquitted, since a forensic expert was unable to determine with certainty that Sevgül's death was caused by another person. However, the court convicted the husband of assault and sentenced him to five years in prison, the maximum possible penalty under the old Penal Code. An appeal against the sentence was still pending at the time of my mission.

42. Officials assured me that every suicide case is thoroughly examined and, when necessary, forensic investigations are undertaken. Nevertheless, more can and must be done to identify and resolve cases involving criminal responsibility. Given the apparent risk of honour murders, medical autopsies undertaken by a specialized forensic institute should be a standard procedure. However, as demonstrated by Suni Eröz's case, this does not seem to be always done. Suni allegedly committed suicide on 17 October 2005 in rural Van. The prosecutor opened an investigation after an anonymous caller claimed in early May 2006 that Suni was murdered. According to witnesses, before her death Suni was accused of having had an affair while her husband was in hospital. It is alleged that the village head (*muhtar*), who is from the husband's family, manipulated the situation and the autopsy was conducted by a local physician instead of by a specialized forensic expert. Two days after her death Suni's alleged lover was found dead in Bursa. Van's Gendarmerie commander explained that the case has been thoroughly reinvestigated and that criminal responsibility could not be found.

43. I am also not aware of any cases of apparent suicides after which a procedure known as a psychological autopsy was performed. This technique is used to determine a victim's mental state at the time of death. It can indicate whether third parties have intervened in the suicide decision. Psychological autopsies are carried out by psychologists or psychiatrists who conduct in-depth interviews with friends, family members and professionals who were in close contact with the suicide victim.

44. It is noteworthy that many of above-mentioned cases occurred long before the new Penal Code came into force. Therefore, the Penal Code itself has probably not provoked forced suicides. Instead, the growing public discourse that has challenged patriarchy and violence against women is a more likely factor which may have made the issue of forced suicides more visible.

2. Links between suicides, patriarchal oppression and violence

45. While there is good reason to believe that there are indeed cases of forced suicide and murder among recorded suicides by women, the majority of cases probably do not involve direct criminal responsibility. However, in many cases family members and the wider society bear varying degrees of moral responsibility.

46. The causes of suicides are never fully within our grasp, not least because the victims cannot be asked about their motives. Personal, family and sociocultural factors typically interlink. Little research has been undertaken worldwide on links between violence against

women and suicides of women.¹⁵ Official statistics typically do not mention physical or psychological violence as a specific reason for suicide. In Turkey, cases resulting from prior acts of violence against women would probably be recorded in the categories of “family incompatibility” (28.9 per cent of all female suicides in 2003) and “emotional relationship and not marrying the person they wanted to” (11.5 per cent).

47. During the course of my mission I had the chance to personally meet with families of suicide victims as well as with women who have survived a suicide attempt. I also spoke with a number of social service officials and representatives from women’s rights groups who had worked on individual cases. These consultations all point to the rigid patriarchal oppression of women and the human rights violations that go along with it - especially forced and early marriages, domestic violence, incestuous rape and denial of reproductive rights - as key contributing factors to the suicides of women in the region. In the absence of adequate State protection, suicide may be the only option for women to escape extreme violence and oppression.

48. A case which occurred in a village near Siverek, Şanlıurfa, in 1999 is illustrative. A young woman preparing to enter university was seen hand in hand with a young man. Rumours that she had engaged in premarital sex began to circulate in the community. After interrogation by a family council about the incident, she attempted to commit suicide using sleeping pills. As a result, the rumours intensified and the family decided to propose a *berdel* (exchange of brides) to the young man’s family. When the young woman refused to marry the man, her brother was ordered to murder her. The brother refused and tried to convince his sister to flee the village with him. Realizing the distress this would cause her family, the young woman detonated a hand grenade.

49. Another telling case is that of Şükran, a 32-year-old woman from a poor neighbourhood in Şanlıurfa which is mainly inhabited by migrants from rural areas. Şükran told me that 13 years ago she married her husband in a religious marriage and they had seven children. Her 16-year-old daughter was married off - also by religious ceremony - to prevent “something bad from happening to her”. One day she discovered by pure chance that her husband was getting married a second time on that very day and had already rented a house in the vicinity for his second wife. Although she and her children lived apart from her husband, she had occasional intercourse with him and became pregnant. He accused her of adultery. A DNA test refuted this accusation and he was convicted of slander. In retribution, her in-laws subjected her to

¹⁵ A survey from Sweden has demonstrated that suicide ideation and actual suicide attempts were more frequent among women who suffered violence (see E. Lundgren et al., 2001, *Captured Queen: Men’s violence against women in “equal” Sweden - a prevalence study*, p. 62). In rural India, where the suicide rate among young women is almost as high as that of young men, psychological violence and harassment by in-laws for increased dowry payments reportedly accounts for a large part of suicides among married women. See P. Mayer and T. Ziaian, 2002, “Are women in Indian society protected from suicide?”, *Crisis*, 23 (3), pp. 98-103.

harassment and violence until Şükran attempted to commit suicide by swallowing rat poison. She survived and regained her will to live. Today, Şükran appears to be quite empowered, holding onto life and working hard to provide a life for her children.

50. The links between patriarchal oppression and suicides of women have also been revealed in a number of academic studies. For instance, a survey¹⁶ of family members of victims of 31 suicides that took place in Batman in 2001 demonstrated that most of the victims were subject to intense patriarchal pressure; 84 per cent were not allowed to go to a park, a movie theatre or to participate in any social gathering without the permission or accompaniment of an older kin; 28 per cent were not even allowed to go out shopping on their own. This pressure seems to have resulted in complete social isolation: only 10 per cent of the victims had ever talked with anyone else about their feelings of desperation. And 66 per cent of the guardians interviewed said that marital partners for daughters are better selected by family, kin or matchmakers and 90 per cent were opposed to their daughters having male friends. Other surveys demonstrated links between suicidal behaviour and factors such as forced virginity testing or childhood sexual abuse.¹⁷

3. The role of the media

51. When asked about the root causes of the suicides, officials whom I met often placed blame on the media, stating that the media, television in particular, presented a world of opportunities to young women which clashed with the restricted options they had in their own lives. The logic underlying such arguments is not at all convincing: continued obstacles for women and girls must be removed, not opportunities hidden.

52. Excessive media coverage of the suicides was also perceived as an encouraging factor. This concern has considerably more merit. Suicide research has demonstrated the existence of a suicide contagion or “copycat” effect. Exposure to suicide through media reports or direct contact with suicide cases increases the risk of suicide. Factual, responsible reporting is therefore essential. Media professionals should provide information about helpful resources for persons at risk rather than showing graphic suicides or otherwise sensationalizing the issue, as is unfortunately often done.¹⁸

¹⁶ M. Bağlı and A. Sev'er, 2003, “Female and male suicides in Batman, Turkey: poverty, social change, patriarchal oppression and gender links”, *Women's Health and Urban Life: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal*, Issue 2 (1), pp. 60-84.

¹⁷ M. Eskin, H. Kaynak-Demir, S. Demir, 2005, “Same-sex sexual orientation, childhood sexual abuse and suicidal behavior in university students in Turkey”, *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 34 (2): 185-195; D. Cindoğlu, 2000, “Virginity tests and artificial virginity in modern Turkish medicine”; Ilkkaracan (ed.), *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies*, Istanbul, Women for Women's Human Rights, pp. 215-228.

¹⁸ WHO Guidelines on Preventing Suicide for journalists and other professional groups are available at: www.who.int/mental_health/resources/suicide/en/index.html. Turkish versions of the texts can be obtained from the WHO Suicide Prevention Programme.

V. RESPONSES TO THE PROBLEM

A. State response

53. The Turkish women's movement in the 1980s identified gender-based violence in the private sphere as a key obstacle to gender equality. In some areas, significant advances were achieved over the years, but a real paradigm change was blocked for a long time by conservative majorities that straddled party lines and benefited from the very low representation of women in politics.¹⁹

54. The women's movement gained new leverage with the official recognition of Turkey's candidacy for European Union (EU) membership at the 1999 Helsinki Summit of the European Council. In this context, Turkey embarked on major reforms to enhance democracy, the rule of law and human rights. While women's rights did not rank as a high priority in the accession process, the women's movement succeeded in sensitizing the EU authorities to pay more attention to the problem. From a gender perspective, significant advances in legislative reform have been achieved, including the Reforms of the Civil Code (2002) and the Penal Code (2005). Today, violence against women has become a central public policy issue and since my mission further steps have been taken to deal with the problem.

1. Penal law framework

55. On 26 September 2004 the Turkish National Assembly adopted groundbreaking reforms of the Penal Code, which entered into force on 1 June 2005. The reforms successfully removed the most obvious patriarchal notions from the law. Rape and sexual assault, which were previously understood as "crimes against public decency and family order", are now defined as "crimes against sexual inviolability". Marital rape has been criminalized (subject to the victim's complaint) and penalties for using violence against the spouse or family members have been strengthened. Virginity testing - a practice often used by families to "determine" a girl's chastity - has also partially been criminalized. Virginity testing authorized by a judge or prosecutor remains legal even if the woman refuses to consent to the intrusive practice.

56. Penal provisions on "honour" murders have also improved. In the past, courts granted reduced sentences for honour murders considering that the perpetrators had been unjustly provoked by the victim's "inappropriate behaviour". Article 82 of the Penal Code now stipulates that killings in the name of *töre* have to be considered as a case of aggravated homicide and the perpetrator(s) must be sentenced to life imprisonment. Women's groups have criticized the reform of article 82 as incomplete, because the provision only makes reference to murders in accordance with *töre*, whereas *namus* killings can occur outside of a customary context. For this reason, some women's groups advocated for the inclusion of the term *namus*. Supporters of article 82, as it now stands, argue that certain types of murders committed in the name of honour (e.g. the father who murders his daughter's rapist) should not automatically be considered to constitute aggravated homicide.

¹⁹ Only 4.4 per cent of parliamentarians are women and the National Assembly has no Commission for Gender Equality.

57. Legal practice will show whether the law, as it stands, sufficiently protects women against all forms of “honour” murders. If the courts do not grasp the spirit of the reform and fail to punish all murders aimed at controlling women’s sexuality or curbing their personal autonomy with the highest sentences, the legislative branch may have to revisit article 82 and amend it once again.

58. In one respect, the reformed Penal Code may mark a step backward. Article 104, as it now stands, could be interpreted as criminalizing consensual sexual relations between teenagers aged 15 to 17 and, albeit phrased in a gender-neutral manner, could in practice reaffirm archaic honour norms of what constitutes appropriate sexual behaviour for girls. Just before the adoption of the law, the Prime Minister introduced a proposal to criminalize adultery committed by married adults. Due to strong national and international reactions, this very problematic provision was dropped.

2. Practical implementation of the Penal Code

59. While from a gender perspective the penal law framework is now overall adequate, significant problems persist in its implementation. Many politicians and administrators still regard domestic violence and forced marriages as internal family matters in which the State should not intervene. In the few cases reported to the law enforcement authorities, officials often try to broker an agreement between parties of inherently unequal power instead of protecting the victims and prosecuting the perpetrators. Particularly in the context of the volatile political situation in the region, some officials are also prone to tacitly subordinate State law to customary forms of conflict resolution in order not to upset relations with local power structures.

60. There have been some indications in recent years that such attitudes, which put women at risk and ensure continued impunity for the perpetrators, are gradually changing. One positive example is the judgement in the case of Emine, strangled by her brother on 12 June 2002 because her family had accused her of “going around with boys”, then forced her into marriage. The family finally decided that she should die anyway. In March 2004 - before the adoption of the Penal Code - Chief Judge Orhan Akartuna, presiding over the First Aggravated Felony Court in Şanlıurfa, convicted Emine’s brother of murder and sentenced him to life imprisonment. Her father, uncle and six other male relatives were each sentenced to 16 years and 8 months in jail for aiding the murderer and partnership in a crime.

61. Political support from elected officials is crucial to further change in the attitudes of local administrators. Following the Penal Code reform, the Minister of Interior published a circular calling on the police to register and follow up on all complaints related to violence against women. Several police commanders I met during the mission explained that, in accordance with this circular, they are responding to all reports of violence against women, even if initial evidence seems insufficient to refer the case to the public prosecutor.

62. In July 2006, the Prime Minister, in conjunction with recommendations of the Parliamentary Commission on Inquiry on Honour Crimes, issued an official circular to all public institutions, which contained measures to be taken to combat violence against women. The circular is a positive step towards the development of a State policy on violence against women.

It calls for preventive and protective measures, including a plan of action (2006-2010), hotlines, a parliamentary commission on gender equality, and a database on violence against women, among other things. It does, however, have a number of shortcomings, such as the perception of women within their traditional reproductive roles and the vagueness of the legal and budgetary implications of the proposed actions.

3. Lack of an effective framework to protect women

63. The lack of an effective institutional framework to protect women facing violence is a major bottleneck in the struggle. Social service officials and members of NGOs often have to improvise protective arrangements, sometimes at great personal risk.

64. The 1998 Law on the Protection of the Family grants abused spouses or other family members living with the perpetrator the right to go to court to apply for a protective order. The application can also be lodged ex officio (without the victim's request) by the public prosecutor. In granting the protective order, the court can require that the perpetrator leave the family home for a period of up to six months or impose other protective measures. Failure to abide by a protective order can result in imprisonment of up to six months.

65. In practice, the law has not lived up to the high expectations and seems to be rarely used. In Batman, for instance, there were only 20 applications for a protective order in all of 2005. The lawyers I spoke with explained that the courts regularly fail to enforce such orders. Clear breaches of the terms of a protective order often result in mere warnings to the perpetrators. Therefore, lawyers often advise their female clients to file for divorce and find a new home rather than seek an ineffective protective order and further aggravate the conflict with the perpetrator.

66. Even more worrisome is the lack of women's shelters that can provide immediate refuge to women escaping violence. The Law on Municipalities, adopted in July 2004, requires all municipalities with more than 50,000 inhabitants to provide a shelter for women victims of violence. By and large this law has not been implemented.

67. In Turkey, a country of over 70 million people, there are only 28 institutions that provide services for women subjected to violence according to information provided by the Government. Seventeen of these institutions, with a total capacity of 325 places, are called "women's guest houses" and are affiliated with the General Directorate of Social Services and the Child Protection Agency. The remaining 11 shelters are operated by various civil and public entities. While two of the latter are licensed by the General Directorate - one in Mersin (25 places) and another in Izmir (18 places) - nine are not (their capacity unknown). Relevant laws and regulations require that shelters be staffed with a director, a psychologist, a social worker, a child development specialist, a nurse and general personnel. However, the information I requested from the Government about the composition of the shelter staffing was also not made available.

68. There were no women's shelters in the three provinces visited. Local officials feared (with some justification) that tribal and extended family ties in the region would make it impossible to keep the shelter's location and the identity of its inhabitants confidential. Given this very real and serious concern, the idea of turning shelters over to local governments needs

to be carefully reassessed. While shelters should be financed by local governments - as stipulated by the law and advocated by the Government - they should be operated by women's organizations that possess the necessary expertise. The placing of women in a shelter should be coordinated under strict observance of confidentiality by a central State entity. Needless to say, in view of the need to respond with urgency and efficiency to the needs of victims of violence, bureaucratic red tape must be avoided at all costs.

B. Civil society initiatives

69. I am particularly encouraged to observe the growth of an autonomous women's movement in the region that spans ethnic identities and religious convictions. Groups such as the KA-MER women's network, the Van Women's Association, the Selis Women's Solidarity Centre and other local women's groups with whose representatives I met during the course of my mission are working against all odds to improve the situation of women in the region and provide protection to those under eminent danger.

70. Most of the women's initiatives and organizing in the region was motivated by questioning violence and its normalization in the public sphere. KA-MER personnel, in explaining how they got started, stated, "This curiosity [about violence] led us to look into our own homes. We found that the place where violence became normalized was the home. Violence against women was continuing ... and each one of us were the victims of its practices ... [I]t was necessary to work for women, together with women".²⁰

71. In each of the provinces visited, there are a number of women's organizations - almost all of which were created after the year 2000 - that conduct research into women's issues and organize awareness-raising seminars. These NGOs also provide legal counselling, accommodation and hands-on support to women victims of violence or those seeking divorce. Women's NGOs have become an important medium for solidarity among women in the region and have linked up with women's organization in other parts of the country. For example, the Van Women's Association contributed to the NGO shadow report which was prepared in response to the Government's 2005 periodic report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

72. Young women are also reacting and protesting the prevalence of violence in the region. According to media reports in September 2005, a small group of brave girls and women in Batman and Hakkari took to the streets following the suicides of young women, declaring that they "do not want to be victims of traditional values". These protests not only sparked public debates but also received support from diverse circles. For example, the Democratic Society Party (DTP), which primarily addresses regional problems, issued a circular which includes the struggle to eliminate violence against women as an integral component of its party strategy.

²⁰ See www.kamer.org.tr/KA-MER-english/about/Kamer.htm. KA-MER, created in 1997, aims to open a branch in all provinces of the region.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

73. There is a dynamic women's movement in Turkey and many individual women have demonstrated a high level of performance in all walks of life, and yet this potential is excluded from formal politics. The development indicators for women are in dire contrast to the country's aspirations, its legal and constitutional provisions and its international commitments. Violence against women in the private sphere is systematic and widespread. A nationwide mobilization for the advancement of women - with political will and commitment - is urgently needed to turn promises into reality.

74. The suicides occurring in eastern and South-eastern Anatolia are intimately linked to gender-based violence, which itself is embedded in the overall parameters of women's status in the country, the regional sociocultural particularities, its overall underdevelopment as well as the ensuing political/ethnic tensions that have made the region a site of turmoil. Particularly, the situation of women in the region is entrenched in the complex ties of tribalism, ethnic politics, patriarchy and national integration policies. Therefore, the high rate of female suicides in the region cannot be approached as isolated, individual incidents.

75. Limited opportunities for women in the region and their limited access to education, employment, information, health services and justice are major constraints to their rights as citizens, potential political power, ability to negotiate the terms of their existence and finding redress for their problems. Local women's voices must be heard and their initiatives supported. Without a reliable institutional and legal framework guaranteeing their rights and protection, women's individual and collective resistance can bring fatal consequences.

76. More specifically, there are reasonable grounds to assume that some recorded cases of suicides in fact constitute grave violence, either because the victim was forced to commit suicide or because a murder was disguised as a suicide. Patriarchal oppression, manifesting itself in diverse forms of violence against women, including forced marriage, early marriage, incestuous sexual abuse and honour-related violence, is often a factor that underlies suicides.

77. I examined the issue of women's suicides from a human rights perspective and have looked at root causes to the extent that they relate to my mandate. The prevention of suicides is a multifaceted issue requiring interventions at many levels. There may be room for improvement with regard to crisis hotlines and other institutions offering help to persons at immediate risk of suicide. Access to the most lethal means of suicide, including firearms and highly toxic pesticides, which remain easily accessible in the country's rural areas, should also be better controlled. In devising a specific suicide-prevention strategy, the Government may wish to enlist the technical cooperation of specialized international agencies such as the World Health Organization.

78. I would like to make the following recommendations to combat violence against women, its causes and consequences, including women's suicides.

79. **The Government should:**

- **Promote and endorse the advancement of women:**
 - **Launch a nation-wide campaign to bridge the gender gap in all political, economic and social spheres, dedicate sufficient funds from the budget and develop time-bound benchmarks;**
 - **Ensure that all girls complete primary education as required by article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, close the gender gap in secondary education and, to this end, increase spending and resource allocation for education and prioritize girl's education in the region;**
 - **Establish an indicator system to monitor educational quality and outcomes in all schools, with gender equality as a key indicator;**
 - **Support, with sufficient resources, State and non-governmental initiatives allowing women and girls to meet outside family circles and engage in empowerment activities (e.g. social centres for women);**
 - **Promote, through public campaigns, gender roles and relations compatible with human rights and gender equality norms, including masculine images de-linked from domination and violent expressions of power;**
- **Strengthen the legal and institutional framework:**
 - **Amend article 10 of the Constitution to include temporary positive measures to redress deep-rooted gender inequalities;**
 - **Promote the creation of a Gender Equality Commission in the National Assembly, mandated to develop legislative proposals to enhance women's rights and mechanisms for the State to fulfil its constitutional responsibility to implement these rights. The Commission should also be tasked with actively monitoring the implementation and practical effect of legislative reforms from a gender perspective;**
 - **Encourage political parties to improve women's representation in politics, including through quotas, especially in the National Assembly;**
 - **Amend remaining discriminatory articles in the Penal Code, such as article 287, which allows virginity testing without the woman's consent under certain circumstances and article 104 that may be interpreted as criminalizing consensual sexual relations between teenagers aged 15 to 17;**
 - **Ensure that the necessary legal, institutional and budgetary requirements are met for the implementation of the Prime Minister's Circular on Violence against Women (2006/17);**

- **Implement a zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of violence against women:**
 - **Adopt a holistic strategy to address the root causes of female suicides and pay particular attention to linkages with gender-based violence and other forms of gender discrimination;**
 - **Mandate law enforcement officials to diligently record, investigate and prosecute all acts of violence against women;**
 - **Train judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officials on gender aspects of the new Penal Code and introduce a gender perspective to curricula of institutions for law professionals and law enforcement and security officers;**
 - **Denounce publicly and unequivocally all forms of violence against women and not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to justify or excuse such violence;**
- **Identify, prosecute and adjudicate cases of forced suicide and disguised murders:**
 - **Ensure that the law enforcement authorities investigate suicides, accidents and other violent deaths of women and girls with particular diligence. In all cases of suicides, accidents or other violent deaths involving women and girls, a full-scale medical autopsy performed by specialized forensic experts should be required. Where there is indication that a suicide may be involuntary, a psychological autopsy should be carried out;**
 - **Prosecutors and judges should not hesitate to apply article 84 of the Penal Code (instigation to commit suicide), whenever it is warranted. The highest sentences should be sought and given for all murders that serve to control women or curb their personal autonomy regardless of whether the crime is committed in the name of honour or custom;**
- **Protect women at risk of violence:**
 - **Lawyers and prosecutors should use the Law on the Protection of the Family in all appropriate circumstances and seek protective orders for women at risk. Courts should diligently enforce protective orders granted and not hesitate to apply sanctions in cases of infractions;**
 - **Urgently implement the Local Administration Law stipulating the creation of shelters in municipalities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. Make available matching funds from the national budget to co-finance the creation and maintenance of all municipal shelters. Provide funds and support to NGO-operated shelters. Create a National Shelter Coordination Board that places women at risk in appropriate shelters ensuring utmost confidentiality and security to all shelters;**

- Institute special social support, training and protection programmes to help women, who cannot safely return to their families, to establish an independent life in a new location and, if necessary, under a changed identity;
- Improve the database on violence against women, its causes and consequences:
- The Turkish Statistical Institute, in cooperation with other relevant authorities, should develop and include in the *Statistical Yearbook* comprehensive statistics on reported cases of the major forms of violence against women prevalent in Turkey;
 - The Directorate on the Status of Women, in cooperation with relevant international agencies, should commission a national survey on violence against women based on a representative sample of the female population;
 - The Ministry of Health, in cooperation with WHO, should commission a study on the root causes of male and female suicides in Turkey, including linkages with violence and discrimination;
 - The Government should compile and report to WHO gender- and age-disaggregated mortality data in accordance with the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10);
 - Work with bar associations in the region to undertake surveys of court cases concerning crimes against women, including suspicious suicides and honour-related crimes and collect data and report on the situation of women, particularly those belonging to marginalized groups, and develop action plans accordingly to address the problems;
 - Security forces (police and gendarmerie) should commission a periodic analysis of recorded cases of crimes against women, including suicides and disseminate the results widely;
- Take additional suicide prevention measures:
- Enlist the technical support of the WHO's Suicide Prevention Programme to devise a national suicide-prevention strategy;
 - Enhance capacity of the Ministry of Health's Crisis Intervention Centres and train teachers, health workers and other professionals who are in close contact with persons at risk of suicide;
 - Improve the control of lethal means used in suicides, including firearms and highly toxic pesticides, and consider ratifying and fully implementing the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants;

- **Collaborate with and support local women's groups working to enhance women's rights.**

80. **I recommend to civil society that:**

- **The media avoid gender stereotypes and discriminatory social attitudes towards women and show sensitivity and respect for the victims and their families when reporting incidents of violence against women; observe confidentiality in reporting on women under protective care; report on suicides and incidence of violence in a factual and responsible manner without sensational coverage and graphic footage; and always provide information on helplines and other resources for persons at risk;**
- **The media and other civil actors should promote public discussions to demystify patriarchal perceptions of honour, custom and tradition and emphasize alternative visions that are compatible with equality and human rights values;**
- **Mainstream human rights organizations should prioritize gender equality and the human rights of women, including women's right to live a life free of violence, in their advocacy and lobbying work;**
- **Women's organizations, bar associations and human rights organizations should collaborate in monitoring the implementation of the Penal Code in cases of violence against women;**
- **Professional associations should disseminate the WHO Guidelines on Preventing Suicide.**

81. **I recommend to the international community that it:**

- **Prioritize, through bilateral and multilateral funding, support for the initiatives of local women's groups, research institutes and academia for research, advocacy and operational projects that aim to contribute to the advancement of women, especially rural and socio-economically marginalized women;**
- **Provide sufficient resources to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations country team to integrate the promotion and protection of women's rights into all of its activities.**
