
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE PROHIBITION OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT IN RUSSIA

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS OF STICHTING JUSTICE INITIATIVE

Introduction

1. Stichting Justice Initiative (SJI) is dedicated to the protection of victims of gender-violence in the post-Soviet region with particular focus on the Russia's Northern Caucasus region. SJI has obtained considerable expertise in the area of gender-violence by successfully representing clients at the national and international level, including at the European Court of Human Rights and at the UN CEDAW Committee. SJI's clients have faced a wide array of domestic mistreatment – from economic and psychological coercion to severe domestic abuse, including honor killings and female genital mutilation (FGM). Some of the cases have territorial specifics (e.g., FGM cases are mostly limited to Dagestan, honor killings and bride kidnapping are predominantly practiced in the North Caucasus); while others are prevalent across the nation (e.g., killings and domestic abuse by partner/husband).

2. Typical domestic violence cases include beatings of a wife and/or children by husband/partner often accompanied by verbal threats. Some of SJI clients died from sustained injuries, others miraculously survived. Several SJI clients have been subjected to threats to share intimate photos, videos, or HIV/AIDS status to force them into sexual intercourse. In one case, ex-husband raped his former wife in order to infect her with HIV/AIDS; in few other cases, a victim was raped by a group. Some of SJI cases deal with sexual violence towards minors (as young as 11 years of age). SJI also represents relatives of victims murdered in the name of honor and victims of bride kidnapping who are forced to marry the kidnapper and are subsequently subjected to further violence. Gender-based violence is widespread not only in the family context but is also prevalent at a workplace. What all of these cases have in common is the impunity of perpetrators or unduly lenient sentence.

Root-causes of domestic violence, torture and ill-treatment

3. Cases of violence against women are underreported, given that they are considered a private matter, and that victim protection services, such as crisis centres and shelters, are

insufficient. Women very rarely apply to the authorities to seek justice due to social stigma and surrounding negative stereotypes. Domestic violence thus becomes to be seen as a family affair and a private plight of being a woman.

4. Prevalence of domestic violence can be attributed to the existence of deeply rooted patriarchal attitudes, absence of preventive measures, inadequate national system for responding to violence against women, as well as social stigma towards women seeking justice for the crimes committed within the family.

Gender stereotypes and attitudes in Russia

5. Domestic violence is aimed at establishing and supporting hierarchical social relations on the basis of gender. As was stated in the 2006 UN Report, “such violence is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between women and men reflected in both public and private life”.¹ No single cause can adequately account for violence against women, the issue should rather be examined in the light of social, religious, cultural and economic factors. “Intimate partner violence is significantly correlated with rigid gender roles that associate masculinity with dominance, toughness, male authority in the home and threats to male authority.”²

6. As the UN Secretary-General notes, “the lack of punishment of persons committing acts of violence against women aggravates the consequence of this violence as a control mechanism. When the state is not capable of charging the person guilty of committing crimes, lack of punishment not only aggravates the subordinate position and helplessness of objects of violence, but sends a message to society that male violence against women is acceptable and inevitable. As a result the model of violent behavior becomes the norm.”³

7. Patriarchy constitutes a form of structural violence against women wherein there are systematic ways in which women are treated as inferior to men due to historical, economic, religious and social processes. Patriarchal attitudes are ubiquitous in Russian society. Traditional attitudes by which women are regarded as subordinate to men contribute to violence against women, and judgments where perpetrators are either exonerated or receive a lenient sentence strengthen these stereotypical beliefs. Such discriminatory judgments revictimize the victims and *de facto* justify domestic violence and/or demonstrate authorities’ high degree of tolerance towards such behaviour. Stereotyping also affects women’s right to a fair trial by creating inflexible standards on the basis of preconceived notions of what constitutes domestic or gender-based violence.⁴ In addition, stigma comes from within communities when women (a) do not conform to cultural standards around what it means to be a ‘good obedient wife’ or does not follow religious or cultural norms and/or (b) apply to authorities to hold partner/husband accountable, thus transforming a ‘private, family matter’ into a public one.

¹ Report of the UN Secretary-General, *In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women*, A/61/122/Add.1 (6 July 2006) [2006 UN Report], para 65.

² *Ibid*, para 75.

³ SJI Report, *Honor Killings of Women in the North Caucasus*, [SJI Honor Killing Report], p 5, available at <https://www.srji.org/upload/medialibrary/a3d/PPI-2018-12-18-Honor-killings-Eng-final.pdf>.

⁴ CEDAW general recommendation No. 33 (2015) on women’s access to justice; see also *L.R. v. Republic of Moldova* (CEDAW/C/66/D/58/2013), para 13.6.

8. One of the main obstacles to effective investigation and adjudication of domestic violence is the limited access that women have to justice because of their unequal status and the prejudices existing at the legal, institutional, structural, social and cultural levels. Police officers are often unwilling to register complaints of domestic violence and even discourage victims from submitting them. In addition, victims continue to be compelled to participate in reconciliation processes with the perpetrators and are often forced to withdraw their official complaints.

Regional: North Caucasus

9. In the North Caucasus, women and girls continue to fall victim to extreme violence and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment through practices claimed to be justified by tradition or custom. Local authorities routinely fail to enforce existing laws, blatantly undermine these laws or even collude with perpetrators. Honour killings and bride kidnapping still persist in the northern Caucasus, particularly in Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia. Perpetrators are rarely brought to justice, thus strengthening their belief in impunity.

10. SJI has conducted a detailed Honor Killings Study and put together the following list of key factors that significantly contribute to the existence of such heinous crime: i) unusual and sometimes willfully distorted interpretations of tradition, religion and adat (custom); ii) patriarchal gender roles; and iii) collective identity (preservation of the family/clan (extended family) reputation).⁵ The in-depth analysis of honor killings illustrates that they are motivated not by tradition, custom (adat) or the norms of sharia law, but rather by the arbitrary and self-styled ambitions of individuals and clans. The unpunished murder of a woman for crossing established boundaries is a vivid example of how female sexuality continues to be regulated by physical and sexual violence and coercion.⁶ This practice is borne out of and incited by the pressure of public opinion, gossip, rumors and slander.⁷

11. In most cases, a victim of domestic violence is pressurized by a number of factors, and she has difficulty focusing on the trial process. In the North Caucasus, the pressure from relatives tends to “muffle” any urge for justice, as collective responsibility is a standard pattern here (the whole situation is considered a “family disgrace” to be thoroughly covered up).

12. Lack of economic independence and fear of losing contact with children often force women to stay in violent relationship. According to the regional socio-cultural practices, children “belong” only to the father’s side of the family. CEDAW affirmed that in the Northern Caucasus “the concept of ‘ownership’ of the father over his children continues to reign, leading in practice to situations in which women lose any contact with their children after divorce”.⁸ Russia, for its part, has previously admitted that according to local traditions, in the event of parents’ separation, as a rule, a child is to be raised by the father’s family.⁹ As

⁵ SJI Honor Killing Report, supra note 3, p 11.

⁶ *Ibid*, p 4.

⁷ *Ibid*, p 3.

⁸ Concluding Observations on the 8th periodic report of the Russian Federation, CEDAW/C/Rus/CO/8, para 45 [CEDAW Concluding Observations].

⁹ *Elita Magomadova v Russia*, no 77546/14, paras 48 and 65.

long as the father or his relatives accept financial burden of children's upbringing, the mother has no say on the matter. Our client Luisa Tapayeva is the only surviving parent of four girls; since her husband's death the paternal grandfather abducted the girls and prevented any contact of Luisa with her daughters.¹⁰ For more than two years after having formally obtained custody of her children, Louisa is still unable to have the decision enforced. Moreover, that custody decision was recently overturned by the Supreme Court of Chechnya in favour of the paternal grandfather. As such, women hardly ever seek divorce when they have young children in order not to get separated from them.

Specific Instances of Violence Against Women

13. Notwithstanding the criminalization by federal law, harmful practices, such as child and/or forced marriage, bride kidnapping, honor killings, female genital mutilation and polygamy are still prevalent in the northern Caucasus region. According to CEDAW, "such harmful practices appear to be socially legitimized and surrounded by a culture of silence and impunity".¹¹

Honor Killings

14. What is commonly described in the North Caucasus as honour killings are the killings of women by their male relatives in order to "restore the family's honour" after rumors, suspicion or evidence of the woman's "inappropriate" behavior (unfaithfulness, a pre-marital relationship, exchanging letters with or dating a man, etc.). The woman's family – usually the male relatives collectively or a particular man such as her father, brother, uncle or cousin – make the decision to kill her as they consider her conduct to be contrary to what is prescribed by local customs and traditions. In most cases, victim's body is then hidden in a hard-to-reach location, therefore the bodies of many alleged victims of honour killings have never been found. Unless the family reports woman's disappearance or suspected murder, the police will not look for her. Only some of the victims' mothers have reported such incidents, although very rarely, as most of them are afraid of public shame, threats and violence.

15. SJI has documented at least 33 cases of suspected honour killings from 2008 to 2017. Less than half of those cases (only 14) were ever tried in court, where perpetrators frequently received light sentences as not only the defence, but also prosecutors and judges cited local custom and mentality in favour of the defendant. Young unmarried girls are the most likely victims, followed by women aged 20-30, mostly divorced but in some cases married. They were usually the daughters, sisters, wives, nieces or step-daughters of the murderer.

Female Genital Mutilation

16. SJI has conducted two field studies on the practice of FGM in the Russian republic of Dagestan, in 2016 and 2018,¹² finding that this harmful practice continues to be

¹⁰ *Tapayeva and Others v Russia*, no 24757/18, communicated on 22 October 2018.

¹¹ CEDAW Concluding Observations, supra note 8, para 23.

¹² See SJI 2016 Report, available at https://www.srji.org/upload/iblock/52c/fgm_dagestan_2016_eng_final_edited_2017.pdf; SJI 2018 Report, available at

perpetrated against girls of pre-school age (usually, from birth to three years) or in rare cases of school age (up to 12 years of age) in several ethnic minority communities of high-mountainous regions of east Dagestan. Recently, there have been media reports that a private clinic in Moscow was offering FGM services to clients motivated by religious or ritual reasons.

17. The type of FGM perpetrated are most often type 1 (partial or full removal of the clitoris) or Type 4 (cutting or incising the clitoris) and less frequently type 2 (partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora). Victims suffer excruciating pain, risk of infection and often life-long physical impairment to sexual and reproductive health and trauma. FGM is rarely performed in hospitals; it is usually done at home by people with no medical background.

18. The purported aim of FGM is to control women's sexuality and behaviour both before and after marriage — to preserve virginity before marriage and, subsequently, sexual fidelity to her husband. The communities that carry out this practice generally look upon it as a sensitive issue related to custom, religion and the family, and do not accept outside intervention. It is usually the mother or other maternal-line relatives who make the decision to perform the operation, motivated by their sense of belonging to the community (among traditionalists) and as a religious initiation rite (in highly religious communities).

19. Based on official birth statistics and prevalence established by our surveys, we estimate conservatively that 1240 girls are subjected to this form of torture every year. Although our reports received media and political attention in Russia, authorities in the republic of Dagestan failed to take action. The local prosecutor's office claimed that since no victims reported to them, they had no evidence of a crime. In June 2018, the children's ombudsmen of the republic of Dagestan threatened to resign if the FGM issue kept being raised.

Forced Marriage

20. Forced marriage persists, whether in the form of bride kidnapping or other ways in which powerful, wealthy, violent men 'requisition' women and girls for (polygamous) marriage or even less formal, non-consensual relationships. Victims rarely receive protection, while their kidnappers often go unpunished.

21. In 2015, Kheda Goilabieva, a 17 year-old school girl in Chechnya, was forced to become the second wife of a powerful police official at least 30 years her senior. Her plight elicited international news coverage, to which local authorities responded by manipulating marriage registration procedures and putting pressure on her family to ensure this forced marriage would take place. Russia's children's rights ombudsmen at the time, Pavel Astakhov, refused to get involved, stating that in this region, girls reach sexual maturity and lose their looks earlier and that the government should not interfere in citizens' private lives.

22. Our client Zaira Bopkhoyeva was kidnapped for marriage as a teenager and subsequently fell sick and ended in a coma in her new in-laws' home, but authorities never

investigated her alleged poisoning and mistreatment. In February 2018, the Russian Government was ruled responsible for violating article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights for failing to conduct an investigation into Zaira's near-fatal poisoning.¹³ To date, Zaira is in a vegetative state with no prospects for recovery. No one has been prosecuted.

Severe cases of domestic violence, including murder and attempted murder

23. Murder cases in the family context are quite common throughout the country. Unfortunately, Russia does not maintain centralized statistics, disaggregated by gender, on domestic violence. The numbers below though demonstrate prevalence of the problem. In 2012, 3,735 women were killed and 9,027 women died from injuries that investigators could not prove to be caused as a result of an accident, violence or to be self-inflicted;¹⁴ the latter figure means that investigative authorities did not have enough evidence to proceed to trial. Another indicator of prevalence of domestic violence is the number of verdicts, where a victim of domestic violence killed her partner/husband or male relative in self-defence. The analysis of the first-degree murder verdicts¹⁵ for 2016-2018 (in total, 2,488 verdicts) where a woman was convicted of murder demonstrated that majority of killings (80%) were done by domestic violence victims.¹⁶ Out of 4,388 manslaughter by excessive self-defence verdicts,¹⁷ 90% of cases occurred in the context of domestic violence towards women who had no choice but to defend themselves.¹⁸ Self-defence is quite rare and is usually a response to the most severe situations of domestic violence. Thus, the numbers above show only the tip of the iceberg.

24. Many of SJI cases involve threats, violence and sometimes subsequent or attempted murder of a woman by her husband or a partner. For example:

- Shema Timagova has been brutally attacked with an axe by her former husband with whom she owned a common residence. The axe blade struck her in the head. The perpetrator left her unconscious and bleeding in the backyard. Ms. Timagova's ex-husband was found guilty under Article 113 of the Criminal Code and sentenced to approximately 10 months' imprisonment, but he was immediately released in the courthouse, since he had already spent several months in detention during the trial. On 12 April 2019, the CEDAW Committee found Russia responsible for failing to uphold her

¹³ *Bopkhoyeva v Russia*, no 25414/14, judgment of 20 February 2018.

¹⁴ SJI 2016 Report "Violence against women in the Russian Federation", available (in Russian) at <https://www.srji.org/resources/search/otchet-pravovoy-initsiativy-po-teme-nasilie-v-otnoshenii-zhenshchin-v-rossiyskoy-federatsii/>.

¹⁵ Article 105(1) of the Criminal Code.

¹⁶ Research conducted by Mediazona ("Медиазона"), available (in Russian) at <http://women105.tilda.ws/?fbclid=IwAR0M1XMZI0GzTBxzjqupawqLRw8gb2yDL8e9JuVTt6GLoYAReRg5ApTC5pY>.

¹⁷ Article 108 of the Criminal Code.

¹⁸ Research available (in Russian) at http://108st.tilda.ws/?fbclid=IwAR0i4ySmWWx8Ve7upq_wpgARmyg2JbsgM1Q_Ezv0ENpug3mqKpiEmf7Vyk.

rights as a victim of domestic violence and by directly perpetuating sex-based discrimination and stereotypes in the handling of her case.¹⁹

- Valeriya Volodina over the course of more than two years was constantly threatened, stalked, kidnapped, as well as regularly beaten and assaulted, including while she was pregnant, by her ex-partner.²⁰ She communicated to the police every act of violence against her, the authorities however remained completely passive, took no measures to protect her, failed to conduct adequate investigation and hold the perpetrator accountable, despite substantial evidence provided by Ms Volodina.
- Children are particularly vulnerable in the context of domestic violence. They are not only witnesses to beatings that their mother is subjected to, but can also be direct victims. In a series of SJI's cases, minor children (often girls but sometimes boys as well) suffered sexual violence from their father. In one case, eleven-year-old was found hanged at home. Evidence indicated that her father committed sexual violence against the daughter and either encouraged her to commit suicide or, most likely, killed her and made it look like a suicide in order to conceal his sexual advances towards the victim.

Legal Obligations

National Legal Framework

25. An absolute prohibition of torture is set out in article 21 (2) of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, pursuant to which no one may be subjected to torture, violence or other cruel or degrading treatment or punishment. A comparable provision is also reflected in article 7 (2) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and in article 9 (2) of the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Russian Federation. At the same time, Russian law neither treats torture as an independent crime nor provides for a separate legal framework for domestic violence. Existing laws do not distinguish domestic violence from other types of violence and thus domestic violence is treated on par with other crimes committed outside the family context. As such, the necessary deterrents are lacking for properly persecuting both torture and domestic violence cases.

26. In the annotation to article 117 of the Criminal Code, the notion of “torture” is defined as the infliction of physical or mental suffering for the purpose of coercing the victim to provide testimony or to perform other actions contrary to his or her will, for the purpose of punishment or for other purposes. This definition does not contain all the elements set out in article 1 of the Convention Against Torture (CAT). Russia is well aware that “the Criminal Code does not contain a separate article establishing criminal liability for acts of torture”,²¹ yet it refuses to bring domestic laws in compliance with its international obligations.

¹⁹ Communication No 65/2014, CEDAW/C/72/D/65/2014, available at https://www.srji.org/upload/medialibrary/9b4/CEDAW_C_72_D_65_2014_28366_E.pdf.

²⁰ *Volodina v Russia*, no 41261/17, communicated on 8 January 2018.

²¹ Russia's Sixth Periodic Report to the Committee Against Torture, para 3, [CAT Report] available at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2fC%2fRUS%2f6&Lang=en.

27. Until 2016, most acts of physical domestic violence were classified as “assault”, requiring private prosecution under which the survivor had to act as her own investigator and prosecutor (the same is also applicable to the cases of rape), not surprisingly leading to a very low reporting and conviction rate. The investigative authorities cannot initiate criminal proceedings *ex officio* (on their own initiative) even if the crime was committed. There will be no persecution by authorities, unless these cases are regarded as unlawful by the victim – such cases may be initiated solely on the victim’s application and based on evidence presented by the victim and may be withdrawn at any time if the victim reconciles with the perpetrator. This results in unduly heavy burden for the victim. For example, SJI’s client Ms Gershman, a resident of Moscow, was battered by her husband and repeatedly brought the battery to the magistrate court. Every time, the magistrate court acquitted the abuser with reference to the applicant’s failure to prove the circumstances in which she sustained her injuries or her husband’s intent of causing her harm.

28. In July 2016, long-awaited reform raised assault against domestic partners to public prosecution status, meaning investigators and prosecutors would pursue cases after a victim’s initial complaint. These legislative innovations were repealed in January 2017 in a heavily politicized campaign, which led to first-time assault being classified as battery, an administrative offense. As a result, most often perpetrators just pay a fine (as low as 5,000 Rubles, ca. 70 Euro).

29. Currently, domestic violence can be prosecuted under article 117. Article 117 of the Criminal Code establishes liability for the infliction of physical or mental suffering through systematic beatings or other violent acts, if these do not lead to the consequences set out in articles 111 and 112 of the Criminal Code concerning severe and moderate bodily harm. Such acts are punishable by deprivation of liberty for up to three years, unless there are aggravating circumstances in which case the maximum term may be up to seven years.

30. According to the Russian Supreme Court’s Judicial Department, in 2018, a total of 1,673 persons were convicted and sentenced under article 117, of whom 525 persons were sentenced to prison terms; at the same time 701 case-files were closed based on grounds other than lack of elements of crime.²² The conviction rate in rape cases is very low and articles 75 and 76 of the Criminal Code allow first-time perpetrators of rape or sexual assault to escape liability upon marriage or settlement with victims.

31. Recent cases, including the *Volodina v Russia* case communicated by the European Court for Human Rights and represented by SJI lawyers, illustrate that as the legislative context has changed repeatedly and significantly since 2016, women facing persistent, dangerous and highly violent threats from their current or former partners find that none of the successive new laws offered them redress.

32. National strategy for women for the period 2017–2022, which aims to combat, inter alia, violence against women has yet to provide any meaningful impact.

²² For comparison, a total of 1,673 persons were convicted and sentenced under article 117, of whom 451 persons were sentenced to prison terms. See <http://www.cdep.ru/index.php?id=79&item=4894> (for 2018); http://www.cdep.ru/userimages/sudebnaya_statistika/2017/k4-svod-2017.xls (for 2017).

Lack of preventive and protective measures for victims of domestic violence

33. No programs exist in Russia for domestic violence perpetrators, nor does Russian law provide for a measure such as a restraining order to facilitate domestic violence prevention and victim protection. Very often, victims are left without any protection.

34. No less significant than the lack of a functional deterrent in criminal law is the absence of any form of protective or restraining order in Russian legislation. Such interim court orders, which should be easy and quick to obtain independently of a criminal prosecution, are considered an indispensable tool for protecting victims. Draft bill FZ-1183390-6 from 2012 provides for such restraining orders, but is not likely to be tabled or adopted anytime soon. In theory, police protection services may be available to witnesses in a criminal trial during the duration of a trial, but we are not aware of any case where a domestic violence victim has been offered such protection.

35. Other vital services to protect and support survivors, such as shelters and rehabilitation programs, are offered by the government or civil society organizations, but nowhere near adequate levels. In a country of 78 million women, as of 2015, there were only 22 crisis centres for women, 23 hostels for women with minor children.²³ As a result, domestic violence shelters offer only 1600 places, and in many federal subjects of Russia no such shelters exist at all. In accordance with the Council of Europe standards, for every 10,000 people at least one place in a shelter should be available. For Russia to be in compliance, shelters and crisis centers should provide at least 7680 places, or five times the existing number.

36. Protective and support service centers mainly operate in Moscow, Saint-Petersburg and several other big cities, thus putting women in rural and remote areas at a distinct disadvantage. The CEDAW Committee has previously stated in relation to Russia that “*women attempting to escape a violent relationship are frequently unable to access independent housing or shelters and thus often compelled to share the same residence with a violent partner, even after the official divorce*”.²⁴ All of these only reinforces the vicious circle of domestic violence and makes it harder for victims to get away from their abusers.

Ineffective and non-existent investigation of incidents of domestic violence

37. One of the central issues affecting the measurement of domestic violence in Russia is that it is known to be significantly under-reported. This submission is mostly based on the legal, analytical and advocacy work undertaken by SJI. Some of the reasons for not reporting domestic violence to police are: fear, shame of going against husband or other male relatives, and embarrassment of being judged, blamed, or not believed. Even when the incident is properly reported, the victims often face judgment and inactivity of law-enforcement officials. Ensuing police investigations, arrests and possible convictions are often discriminatory towards female victims.

²³ CAT Report, supra note 21, para 100.

²⁴ See, Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Russian Federation, CEDAW/C/USR/CO/7, 16 August 2010, para. 48.

38. Criminal or administrative proceedings against a perpetrator are often insufficient for protecting the victim from further violence. Often victims are forced to withdraw the charges and reconcile with perpetrators in order to keep the family intact for the sake of children or because they have nowhere else to go.

RECOMMENDATIONS

39. These recommendations echo the recommendation made by CAT and CEDAW, as well as reflect the needs of SJI's current and future clients:

- adopt comprehensive legislation to prevent and address violence against women, including domestic violence, intimidation and threats of violence and introduce penalties commensurate with the gravity of the offence;
- reinstate the criminal prosecution of domestic violence under Article 116 of the Criminal Code;
- promptly, effectively and impartially register all complaints, ensure that all incidents and allegations of domestic violence are investigated, and prosecute all those found to be responsible,
- collect relevant statistics (including but not limited to, the cases that have been reported, but later closed);
- introduce *ex officio* prosecution of domestic violence and renounce private prosecution in cases of domestic violence, on the basis that this places the burden of proof entirely on victims, who are vulnerable and traumatized;
- ratify the Optional Protocol to CAT and establish a national preventive mechanism in accordance with the Optional Protocol;
- sign and ratify the Istanbul Convention;
- provide the necessary protective measures to guarantee the safety of the victims, such as restraining order and orders of protection;
- provide victims of domestic violence with safe and prompt access to justice, including free legal aid, in order to ensure that they have access to available, sufficient and effective remedies;²⁵
- provide victims of domestic violence and their children with prompt and adequate support and rehabilitation, including shelter and psychological support by specially trained health-care workers;
- combat impunity in torture/ill-treatment and domestic violence cases, including by ensuring that high-level government officials publicly and unambiguously affirm that such actions will not be tolerated and perpetrators will be brought to justice;
- address and publicly discuss with all relevant stakeholders (including religious leadership, civil society, and high-ranking officials) the stereotypes, prejudices, customs and practices that condone or tolerate domestic violence.

²⁵ Currently, there is no free legal aid for victims of domestic violence; only the accused has the right to obtain free legal advice and legal representation in court.