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No Excuse for Legislators

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It is not trivial facts, but rather exceptional ones that push us, both male and female Lebanese citizens, to demand the enactment of a law that protects women from domestic violence, and we call upon the legislators to follow in our track. Laws cannot just be based on customs and beliefs, or on conventions and treaties... The legislative body, i.e., the MPs “representing” us, both male and female citizens of the Republic, should primarily rely on *facts*, as these constitute the critical factor for passing such a bill.

Facts speak for themselves... We just have to listen to them attentively. They tell us the following:

First: Domestic violence perpetrated against women is a fact that cannot be denied. Testimonies revealed by courageous battered women in courts, on television, in documentaries, as well as those unveiled in private to physicians, nurses, psychotherapists, social workers, religious service providers, lawyers, and the security forces, etc... reveal the atrocities of such abuses. Detailed information related to such abuses is documented, and the published works of both male and female researchers are available to the public in all traditional and new media outlets.

Second: A law is needed to protect women because the overwhelming majority of adult victims of domestic violence are women. Women who resort to violence against their husbands (or against other male relative), do so in self-defense; their percentage never exceeds 5% versus 95% of male perpetrators.

Third: Women are victims of violence because they are women, and not because they are physically or socially disadvantaged, young, weak, powerless, or elderly, nor because they lack social support. Women might be strong, competent, young, and have a successful career... But they will be battered anyway. It is not competence, strength, good physical condition, youth, or professional

independence that would guarantee women's security and safety at home. Unlike other members of the family who might suffer from abuse, women are abused because customs and beliefs have 'normalized' violence against them rendering it invisible.

Fourth: Family femicide is no more than the maximization of normalized and on-going violence against women (VAW henceforth) that culminates in murder. Enacting a law that protects women from family violence will prohibit murder and prevent the tragedy of turning the victims' husband (fathers or brothers, as the case may be) into criminals, the victims' children into orphans, and the victim's family into a stigmatized one.

Fifth: Women cannot rely on the family circle to ward off violence. Those who are abused by their husbands (or by any other male relative), rarely find support in their family entourage. Moreover, when battered women sought protection from people outside their close family circle, be it the local community civil or religious leader or the police personnel, they are likely to be 'advised' to 'bear their lot' for the sake of guarding their family unity or in the hope of 'gaining the bliss of Paradise in their afterlife', thereby ensuring the perpetuation and intensification of abuse.

Sixth: In Lebanon. It is not mandatory for police officers, lawyers, physicians, social counselors, colleagues in the workplace, neighbors, friends, clergymen, etc..., or any other potential witness of women subjected to family violence to report such abuse. Legally, they are not under any obligation to report on domestic violence, nor do they benefit from any legal protection in case they did. Thus, deprived of forthright legal authority, those persons too are not obligated to report VAW they witness and help in putting an end to it.

Seventh: Both male and female Lebanese citizens have condemned–VAW on many occasions and in various ways. Their protest movement was mainly addressed to the Parliament, in order to enact a comprehensive law that would deter abusers, punish them, and safeguard women. They have also called on the state to bear the responsibility for both enacting laws and implementing them with respect to domestic violence.

Based on the described patent situation, we say the following to our legislators:

First: MPs need to remember that they are mandated by both male and female citizens to pass laws that safeguard their safety and security throughout the territory of the country, comprising the household. They are also responsible vis-à-vis the international community to promote women's rights including their rights to safety. Hence, our MPs have to assume the responsibilities incumbent on them by passing a law that protects and safeguards women everywhere including the household.

Second: The Lebanese state, through its judicial, security, and social institutions is responsible for the enforcement of civil law and may not delegate this responsibility to any other authority such as the religious or the familial institutions.

Third: When it comes to enacting a law to protect women from family violence, Legislators may not rely on common beliefs, customs and general perceptions notoriously known to be gender biased. Legislation concerning the situation of Lebanese women has to be based on solid examination of the prevailing situation of the abuse of skewed power relations in the family.

Fourth: Facts concerning domestic abuse of women are documented and made available to the public via field studies, research-based reports, journalistic investigations, and audio and video recordings. Moreover, MPs can resort to oral testimonies by calling on battered women, or by interviewing witnesses of 'traces and marks' of abuse left by perpetrators on the bodies and souls of victims... witnesses such as health professionals, psychotherapists, educators, researchers, lawyers, security forces, as well as members of governmental and non-governmental organizations, etc... All stand ready to provide them with available or collected upon request information.

Finally: There is no excuse for legislators who ignore the reality when it comes to enacting a law that aims at protecting domestically abused women. All MPs will be held accountable to women if they fail to assume their responsibilities. "Now, now, and not tomorrow", because "Women's safety is more important than their parliamentary seats" as chanted the demonstrators during the recent street protest that asked for placing the proposed bill that protects women from domestic violence on the agenda of the parliament during its upcoming general assembly

session. A simple reminder to MPs is in order: A true support of women's cause in their fight for combating violence and discrimination is the best guarantee for a candidate, male or female, to win women's votes in the upcoming parliamentary elections!

ⁱ "Kafa Enough Violence and Exploitation" and the "National Alliance for Legislating the Protection of Women from Family Violence" called for a demonstration Sunday, February 24, 2013, in Beirut.