Amnesty International USA

16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence:
Let's Challenge Militarism and End Violence Against Women

(25 November – 10 December 2013)

Syria:
Safe Access to Toilet Facilities for Women and Girls in Za'atri Camp

(A refugee woman performs daily tasks at the Za'atri Camp in Jordan. Copyright © Amnesty International)

Since the outbreak of the Syrian uprising in mid-March 2011, more than 100,000 people have died in the ensuing crisis and internal armed conflict. More than 2 million people have fled across Syria's borders to escape the widespread violence and human rights abuses, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. The vast majority of them are in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt, placing significant strains on these countries' infrastructures and economies. A further 4.25 million individuals have been displaced internally in Syria.

Amnesty International has met with hundreds of refugees from all of the governorates of Syria who have fled to neighboring countries. Each and every refugee has a unique story of suffering and survival, but most of the Syrian women refugees the organization has spoken to in refugee camps said that their main reason for leaving Syria was fear of rape and sexual assault.

Amnesty International is very concerned that even after Syrian refugee women and girls have fled Syria, **many of them are still at risk of sexual and gender-based violence in refugee camps** and communities in neighboring countries where they are now living. Amnesty International has received information from women rights activists, aid workers and some refugee women that Syrian refugee women and girls are sometimes targeted for a range of sexual and gender-based violations including sexual assault and harassment and early and forced marriages. Activists and aid workers also told the organization that domestic violence has increased and that there are reports of rape.

Among the Syrian refugee women and girls with whom Amnesty International has spoken are those living in the Za'atri camp in Jordan, the world's second largest refugee camp, located in a harsh, desert-like area and home to some 120,000 refugees.

For women and girls, the general insecurity in Za'atri is exacerbated by many difficulties that have a particular impact on them. Women told Amnesty International that the communal toilets are unlit – the lights are often stolen by individuals from within the camp, it seems – and they feel unsafe using them, especially after dark. **In particular, they fear they will be subjected to sexual violence or harassment or otherwise attacked.** In addition, in some areas

of the camp, men have made public announcements that the toilets are unsafe and that women should not go there after 10pm. As a result, many women avoid the toilets, especially at night, which has had serious health consequences.

Many women in Za'atri camp told Amnesty International that they were suffering from urinary tract infections. Amnesty International spoke to three doctors working in the camp, who confirmed that the urinary tract infections were the result of women restraining themselves from urinating. Some women also told Amnesty International that they fear sexual violence and harassment when moving around the camp and there are numerous rumors circulating about incidents of sexual violence.

Amnesty International is calling for the Jordanian Minister of Interior, Hussein al-Majali to ensure women and girls in Za'atri camp have safe and secure access to toilet facilities at all times, day and night.

Take Action Now!

Call for action: Write a letter to Jordanian Minister of Interior Hussein al-Majali

Write to the Minister of Interior and urge him to:

Enhance safe and secure access to toilet facilities in Za'atri camp for women and girls by preventing vandalism of toilet lights and increasing police presence near the toilets in co-ordination with UNHCR, in consultation with residents of the camp and in a way that would minimize security threats to users, especially women and girls, throughout the day and night.

Write to: His Excellency Hussein al-Majali
Minister of Interior
Ministry of Interior
PO Box 100
Amman
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
F: +962 6 560 6908
E: **info@moi.gov.jo**

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