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## UGANDA

### Doubly Traumatized

#### Lack of access to justice for female victims of sexual and gender-based violence in northern Uganda

November 2007

Summary

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Many women and girls in northern Uganda suffer sexual and gender-based violence committed by state actors, including official authorities and military officers, and non-state actors within the family and in the community. These women victims of violence in northern Uganda often face insurmountable difficulties in trying to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice. Many are afraid to report rape and other forms of violence, not only because of intimidation, hostility and ridicule from the community, but also due to state inaction in ensuring redress. As a result, the justice system in northern Uganda ignores, denies and tacitly condones violence against women and girls and protects suspected perpetrators. Amnesty International considers victims' lack of access to justice as an issue of serious concern warranting the immediate attention of the Ugandan government and the international community.

Often, there are no police officers to report cases to. Police posts and stations are few and far between in the whole of northern Uganda. Many times the police officers who are available to report to are not sensitive to the rights of victims in the context of the trauma of the violence (including rape). The majority of police officers in northern Uganda are Special Police Constables (SPCs) who are newly deployed, with limited training. They are ill equipped and unmotivated. Even the basic ingredients of laying a report to the police and other authorities seemed undermined; most police stations and police posts do not have medical examination forms. These forms have to be filled by the medical officer carrying out the medical examination and are crucial for documenting evidence of

violence. Where the medical examination forms are available, there is usually an inadequate supply and they quickly run out. Obtaining the forms usually requires the payment of an illegal “photocopying fee” by the victim or her family who are often too poor to afford these costs. Even when the victim obtains the medical examination form, it is not clear which medical officer is authorised to fill in the forms. Victims have to wait for inordinately long periods for the medical examination to be conducted, as government doctors and medical officers are very few. Victims are often charged for the medical examination. In addition, medical officers who conduct the examination are reluctant to give evidence in court. Although the court structure is taking shape and the judiciary is beginning to function in a limited manner in northern Uganda, these courts are barely adequate and have overwhelming caseloads. All these constraints often mean that even where a case is referred for trial, very few cases, if any, are successfully concluded. The result is that many female victims of sexual and gender-based violence have lost trust in the justice system – they often opt to remain silent

In its recommendations, Amnesty International calls on the government to take urgent and immediate action to comply with its international obligations to protect women and girls from rape and other forms of violence against women.

Uganda is party to international human rights instruments such as the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In addition, Article 33 of the Ugandan Constitution makes provision for the right of women to equality.

This report summarizes a 36 page document (11,690 words), *Uganda: Doubly Traumatized: Lack of access to justice for female victims of sexual and gender-based violence in northern Uganda*, issued by Amnesty International in November 2007. Anyone wishing further details or to take action on this issue should consult the full document. An extensive range of our materials on this and other subjects is available at <http://www.amnesty.org> and Amnesty International news releases can be received by email:

[http://www.amnesty.org/email/email\\_updates.html](http://www.amnesty.org/email/email_updates.html)

