

**Question for written answer E-010752/2011
to the Commission**

Rule 117

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Subject: Abuse of women in Pakistan

A decade ago in Pakistan, a shocking case of violence was brought to light when Ms Mukhtar Mai revealed that she had suffered a gang rape. The courageous decision of this woman from a remote village to go public with her rape broke with the taboo of silence surrounding rape in Pakistan. Two weeks ago, a three-member Supreme Court of Pakistan upheld the acquittal of five of the six men accused in her assault. This decision came five years after a lower court found that she had indeed been gang raped. All but one perpetrator was exonerated because Ms Mai had not been able to substantially prove she was raped. This was seen by the international community as an example of a government not 'hearing' its women.

The gang rape was carried out under orders from tribal leaders who wished to punish her family because her brother had had relations with a girl from a powerful clan and higher caste. The act was payment for her family's 'crime of honour.' A member of the alleged 'aggrieved' family, also as punishment, sodomised her brother.

Rape victims in Pakistan face the ordeal of tremendous social stigma, often leading to their suicide. Instead of silence, shame, or suicide, Ms Mai defied social and religious taboo and took her attackers to court. After years in various courts in order to obtain justice, Ms Mai took her case to the highest levels of government and became a symbol of women's struggle to end the social stigma that rape carries. For many years, women like Ms Mai had suffered in silence without asking for justice.

What can the Commission do to support the struggle of such women and how can they be better protected in future?

What are the many civil society actors supported by the Commission doing to support rape victims and the rights of women in general?