

Washington, DC 20515

April 10, 2000

The Honorable Janet Reno  
U.S. Attorney General  
Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Re: Ms. A-  
A# 72 438 529

Dear Attorney General Reno:

We are writing on behalf of Ms. A, a woman from Jordan who fled her country of birth out of fear for her life. The denial of her asylum claim by an Immigration Judge and the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) raises troubling questions regarding the United States refugee and asylum policy and our government's commitment to the protection of women's human rights.

Ms. A fled to the United States in 1991 because she fears being the victim of an "honor killing" in her home country. In 1991, A and her now-husband, H, secretly started spending time together, and in September H proposed marriage. However, A's father forbade the marriage because H is Palestinian and had a low paying job. A feared that she would be killed if her family found out she had lost her virginity, and she fled with H to get married abroad. The airport police told A's father that she left the country.

In three letters from her sister received over a five-year period, A has learned that her father is enraged and has declared that the shame she has brought on the family can only be removed by "blood." He has demanded that all fifteen of her male relatives, including brothers, uncles and cousins, act to kill her wherever they find her. In the most recent letter, A learned that her father said that, should he die before he has revenge on A, he will not rest in peace until the honor killing is carried out.

That honor killings are prevalent in Jordan and inadequately dealt with by the government has been widely recognized. According to the 1998 State Department Report on Human Rights Practices, more than 20 "honor killings" were reported in Jordan that year, and the actual number is believed to be four times as high. Fully twenty five percent of the murders in the country are estimated to be honor killings. The only form of protection offered to women who fear becoming victims is their own imprisonment. Article 340 of the Jordanian Penal Code provides that men prosecuted for "crimes of honor" face lenient sentences, averaging three months to a year. The penalty for murder under the Jordanian Penal Code, by comparison, is death. A governmental proposal to reform Article 340 was defeated in Parliament in November 1999.

The immigration judge in California who denied A's claim for asylum on January 8, 1998, found her to be credible. However, the judge questioned whether her fear was reasonable as A had not directly spoken with her father to confirm his threats. Although the judge acknowledged that honor killings do occur in Jordan, she stated that they are simply violent episodes in specific families