

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 14, 2000

The Honorable Janet Reno  
Attorney General  
United States Department of Justice  
Washington, D.C. 20530  
Re: A# 72 438 529

Dear Ms. Reno:

We write to express our support for the asylum application of Ms. A-, a Jordanian woman whose family has consistently expressed its intention to kill her if she returns to Jordan. A- fled to the United States in 1991 to escape death in an "honor killing," a widespread Jordanian practice in which women are murdered by their families for shaming or dishonoring them.

A-'s plight has been brought to light by numerous news organizations, including National Public Radio and the Washington Post. According to these accounts, A-, then 27, fell in love with H-, a 26-year-old Palestinian, during the summer of 1991. H- asked A- to marry him, but her father forbade the marriage because H- was Palestinian and had a low-paying job. Because H- and A- had had premarital sex, A- was faced with the possibility that she might be pregnant and the certainty that her future husband, whoever he might be, would know that she was no longer a virgin. Either outcome could bring shame and dishonor to her family. Fearing for her life, A- escaped with H- to the United States.

It has been reported that A- and H- married in the U.S. and have since had three children. Meanwhile, there are credible reports that A-'s father has explicitly and repeatedly called for her death, presumably because A- had premarital sex, left Jordan without her family's permission, and married against her family's wishes. In a June 1, 1995 letter to A- that has been submitted as evidence in the asylum proceedings, A-'s sister wrote that their father had met with their nuclear family, uncles, and cousins to demand that they kill A- wherever they might meet her.

Despite this evidence that A- faced death if she returned to Jordan, an immigration judge denied her asylum request on January 8, 1998. The judge found that although "honor killings" did occur in Jordan, they were violent episodes in specific families, not a pattern and practice against Jordanian women generally. A-'s fear was thus a "personal problem." Regrettably, the Board of Immigration Appeals affirmed the lower court's decision on August 20, 1999. It ruled that A-'s fear of being killed was speculative, and that in any event, any harm she suffered would be the result of a "personal family dispute."

In our view, the BIA's decision here contradicts its own landmark 1997 opinion granting asylum to Fauziya Kasinga, who faced female genital mutilation (FGM) if forced to return to her native Togo. In *Matter of Kasinga*, the BIA found that women fearing FGM were a "social