

European Parliament: HRWF debate on child marriage on EU REPORTER TV

– Watch the video here: https://youtu.be/wg0K0_XA6Vg

Panelists

Elisa Van Ruiten, a Gender Specialist at Human Rights Without Frontiers International;

Mohinder Watson, a researcher and activist against child marriage, who escaped a forced marriage of her own as a teenager;

Emilio Puccio, the Coordinator of the European Parliament Intergroup on Children's Rights, which is a cross-party and cross-national group comprising over 90 MEPs and 25 child-focused organizations.

The presenter was EU Reporter's Jim Gibbons.

“Every day somewhere in the world, 39,000 young girls are married before they reach the age of majority; more than a third of them are younger than 15, according to the Council of Europe. We may be well into the 21st century but too many girls are still forced to live in a bygone age of male dominance. Human Rights Without Frontiers has just produced a report on women's rights and the Abrahamic faiths of Christianity, Islam and Judaism.”

EU Reporter – <https://bit.ly/2CTvNPh>

Next Programme about North Korea (November) –

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WORLD: Want gender equality? Let's start with ending child marriages

By Megan E. Corrado

The Hill (12.10.2018) – <https://bit.ly/20jZnTS> –

Each Oct. 11th the global community pauses to recognize and celebrate the [International Day of the Girl Child](#). However, girls continue to face unique challenges simply for being young and female.

The mere fact that they are born female often results in a [devastating series of consequences](#), which inhibit girls from attaining gender parity, equal protection under the law, the free exercise of their human rights and the ability to realize their full potential.

The 2018 theme, “[With Her: A Skilled GirlForce](#),” aims to ensure girls have the skills necessary to attain financial viability. One major obstacle preventing girls from achieving these goals is child marriage.

Worldwide, around [15 million – or one in three – girls](#) are annually subject to child marriage, often forced or coerced. [Married minors are more likely to experience](#) poverty, domestic violence, lack of access to education, sexual abuse and emotional and physical health challenges. Child marriage frequently leads to adolescent pregnancy and childbirth, which pose dramatic risks due to a girl's biological immaturity. Moreover, [pregnancy is the leading cause of death](#) of girls aged 15-18. Those that survive often grapple with pre-birth

complications, fistulas, stillbirth and other physical ramifications to themselves and their children.

Child marriage is [recognized as a human rights violation under international law](#) because it adversely affects the rights of girls and women. It bars them from being able to consent to marriage, receive an education, have healthcare and live without fear or exploitation. These rights are explicitly enumerated under [the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) and other international instruments.

Decades of advocacy culminated when the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council adopted [its first substantive resolution](#) distinguishing child/forced marriage as a human rights abuse in 2015. The international community has since committed to eliminating child marriage by 2030 per the UN [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

While the practice is prevalent in countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Chad and Niger, a lack of laws and law enforcement ensure its existence across social, economic, religious and geographical spectrums. Even in the United States, 24 states have no statutory minimum age for minor unions and 48 states provide for [judicial and/or parental exceptions](#) to child marriage restrictions.

In Afghanistan, [well over half](#) of all Afghan women are married before 18. Afghan law, however, prohibits marriage before 16 for girls and 18 for boys, although a court or girl's father may consent to her marriage at 15. Despite this law, the deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes and attendant [transactional perspectives](#) towards marriage often give rise to the deployment of child marriage as a bartering mechanism, frequently before the child brides hit puberty.

The practice of "badal" results in the exchange of daughters

between two families for marriage, while “ba’ad” involves marrying off a girl to pay a debt, bring peace, or serve as recompense for murder, sexual assault, or other perceived crimes/wrongs committed by one family or community against another.

Poverty, insecurity, gender discrimination, lack of access to health care and education are the [key drivers](#) of child marriage. Poor families, particularly in rural areas, [sell their daughters](#) to wealthier families in exchange for large dowries, often to men who are significantly older and have additional wives.

The practice of child engagement, wherein two families commit a son and daughter to each other for marriage, remains rampant. Rates of child marriage [increase dramatically](#) in internally-displaced person and refugee returnee camps, where extreme financial hardship, illiteracy and lack of educational and economic opportunities are even more common.

Child brides are most often unwittingly thrust into arranged marriages. The power dynamics of these marriages, particularly with significant age disparity, render girls vulnerable to physical, sexual and psychological abuse from their husbands and families. [In order to escape these challenges](#), many brides run away from home, subjecting themselves to imprisonment for committing “moral crimes,” while others choose suicide.

Women’s full participation in decision-making and society is [imperative to eliminating](#) gender inequality, discrimination, violence and poverty. Restricting child marriage is a critical first step to ensuring girls can continue their education, freely exercise their rights, effectively participate in political, social and economic life and enter the “[GirlForce](#).”

Governments must both enact and enforce appropriate laws, devoid of discriminatory legal loopholes, to unleash the cultural change necessary to achieve the [gender equality goal](#)

of the UN's Sustainable Development Agenda and give girls the opportunities they deserve.

LEBANON: Married at fourteen: Mervat's story



SB OverSeas (17.10.2018)- Mervat is one of the teachers at SB OverSeas, an organisation working to provide education and empowerment programs to refugees in Lebanon. She was also married at a young age, deprived of a childhood. In this story, you will learn about this woman who at the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, found herself in Lebanon where she sought means to find economic independence by learning how to sew leading her to teach classes at SB OverSeas' centres and this platform provided her with a means to help empower other women in her situation.

Mervat was married at the mere age of fourteen. Despite protestations, she found herself married against her will due to her grandfather's wishes. This marriage, along with many other early marriages, signaled an end to her education. Her own dreams were replaced by a child and a life of marriage. Mervat had always enjoyed working with her hands to create beautiful products but was restricted by the responsibilities she bore and was unable to pursue this dream.

Following the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, she found herself, along with her husband and children seeking refuge in Lebanon. In Beirut, she searched for a way to make a meagre earning by learning how to sew. Ignoring the comments of her family, she started classes with SB OverSeas in 2014. Her warm and welcoming personality, along with her natural talent for creating products meant she was a born teacher. Mervat started leading classes in our centre in Bukhara Ahla. With this, she was able to help other women in similar situations to create products that they could sell in local shops so they could gain a sense of financial independence.

Through this, she found a way to empower herself and use her experiences to empower other women. By teaching classes, she had a platform to talk to many of the young girls about her own experience of being married young. She hopes that she will be able to help those girls who are already married to not feel so alone by always being there to lend a listening ear, and those who are not married, to equip them with the tools to reject marriage.

Read here about SB OverSeas' [empowerment programs](#) for refugee women in Lebanon.

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IRAQ: Slaying of Instagram star shocks Iraq

By Sinan Salaheddin

ABC News (03.10.2018) – <https://abcn.ws/2DTa8b8> – She was a 22-year-old former beauty queen, fashion model and social media star, whose daring outfits revealed tattoos on her arms and shoulder.

Tara Fares won fame and 2.8 million Instagram followers in conservative, Muslim-majority Iraq with outspoken opinions on personal freedom, such as: “I’m not doing anything in the dark like many others; everything I do is in the broad daylight.”

It was also the way she died.

Last week, she was shot and killed at the wheel of her white Porsche on a busy Baghdad street during the day, apparently by a man who leaned in briefly and opened fire before speeding away on a motorcycle with an accomplice.

The killing, caught on security camera video, followed the slaying of a female activist in the southern city of Basra and the mysterious deaths of two well-known beauty experts.

The violence has shocked Iraq, raising fears of a return to the kind of attacks on prominent figures that plagued the country at the height of its sectarian strife.

Iraq is still recovering from its bloody fight against Islamic State militants. The country has been without a government since national elections in May, and riots have repeatedly broken out in the south over the authorities' failure to provide basic services.

"These harrowing crimes are worrying us," said Iraqi human rights activist Hana Adwar. "There are groups that want to terrify society through the killing of popular women and activists ... and to tell other women to abandon their work and stay at home."

It is not clear whether the deaths of the women are connected, and reports that they knew each other could not be confirmed.

Fares, with an Iraqi father and a Lebanese mother, first became famous in 2015 when she won an unofficial Baghdad beauty pageant organized by a social club. She has become a social media darling, with bold posts and photos of herself posing in elaborate makeup, tight jeans and blouses that showed off her tattoos.

A YouTube channel drew more than 120,000 followers in addition to those on Instagram, where she shared makeup tips.

She gave details of a brief marriage at 16 to an abusive husband who posted intimate photos of her on social media and took away their now 3-year-old son. Fares said the experience taught her “strength ... and how not to let anyone control me in anything.”

Fares also spoke out occasionally against religious, tribal and political leaders.

While many young Iraqis shared her videos and pictures, others criticized her lifestyle as racy and un-Islamic.

She lived in Iraq's self-ruled Kurdish region with her family, visiting Baghdad from time to time. In a TV interview this year, she said her family had converted to Islam in 2002.

Hours after she was gunned down on Sept. 27, a video on social media showed her body being carried away by a group of young people, with her face and white shirt stained with blood. She was buried in the Shiite holy city of Najaf, her grave decorated with a black-and-white photo of her, along with red plastic flowers.

In August, Dr. Rafeef al-Yassiri, a plastic surgeon labeled "Iraq's Barbie," died under mysterious circumstances. Authorities initially called it a drug overdose but have not offered an update in over a month, leading to rumors she might have been poisoned.

Al-Yassiri, a Shiite Muslim with a prominent social media presence, ran the Barbie medical center, which offered cosmetic surgery as well as treatment for war victims and those with birth defects.

She posted photos of herself in full makeup and fashionable clothes, promoting her latest projects to more than 1 million Instagram followers. She also worked with local and religious charities.

A week after her death, Rasha al-Hassan, the owner of a well-known beauty center in Baghdad, was found dead in her home. Authorities initially said she suffered a heart attack.

On Sept. 25, a gunman killed Soad al-Ali, a prominent activist

in the southern city of Basra. Al-Ali had organized protests demanding better services and jobs and decried the growing influence of Iran-backed Shiite militias in the area. Police said the killing was “purely personal” and had nothing to do with the protests.

Last weekend, another former beauty queen, Shaimaa Qassim, posted a video on Instagram in which she tearfully said she had received threats through social media.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has ordered an investigation into what he called “well-planned kidnappings and killings.” He said organized groups are “carrying out a plan to destabilize the security situation under the pretext of fighting perversion.”

Security agencies have not yet commented on the investigation into Fares’ death and no group has claimed responsibility.

Iraq once boasted a liberal society and progressive laws for women and the family, going back to the 1950s. Those gains were eroded after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, which toppled Saddam Hussein and led to the emergence of powerful religious parties and a rise in extremism.

Posters on some streets, particularly near shrines, exhort women to cover their hair and wear an abaya – a long, black cloak that covers the body from shoulders to feet.

“After the killing of Tara Fares, I feel speechless,” columnist Mohammed Ghazi al-Akhras wrote on his Facebook page. “We’ve reached the moment of total anarchy. They will kill everyone they don’t like. ... The state of death is taking shape.”

In one of her videos, Fares had chastised a Shiite cleric who she said had sought a temporary marriage with her, a tradition in Shiite communities that critics compare to prostitution.

“I’m not afraid of the one who denies the existence of God, but I’m really afraid of the one who kills and chops off heads to prove the existence of God,” she wrote on Instagram in July.

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TUNISIA: Women fight for right to marry non-Muslims

Since September 2017, Tunisian women are free to marry non-muslims

By Alessandra Bajec

The New Arab (25.09.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2NZWSGd> – One year after scrapping of a ban on marriage between Muslim women and non-Muslim partners, Tunisia experiences resistance at a local level on its path to social change amid a resurgence of conservatism.

Since September 2017, Tunisian women are free to marry non-Muslims. President Beji Caid Essebsi repealed a circular dated to 1973, inspired by the country's Muslim traditions that previously required non-Muslim men to convert to Islam in order to marry a Muslim woman. Only then the country's Mufti would allow the marriage to take place.

Despite the change in legislation, the fight over inter-religious marriages is not over yet as many women have recently stumbled on problems when trying to marry outside of Islam.

The case of Zeineb and her Italian fiancé Sergio is very illustrative of this fight. Speaking in her coastal town Hammamet, she told about the bureaucratic battle they fought

after they decided to wed back in June and prepared all the paperwork for the legal procedure.

“The whole problem was that we couldn’t find in Hammamet a notary who was willing to marry us,” Zeineb said recalling the first three notaries she approached who refused to validate the marriage.

Two motivated their rejection saying that allowing such marriage was against their principles, the third said that the municipality did not want to register the marriage contract.

“The law must be respected,” Sergio commented, baffled at the many obstructions they found.

“I’m not Muslim, and I won’t change to please the Mufti. Is it my life or the Mufti’s life?” he questioned in a sarcastic tone, “where’s my personal freedom?”

While some of the reluctant officials declined out of “religious convictions,” others claimed they still had to receive or read through the new regulations on interfaith marriages.

After going around and phoning most notaries of Hammamet, the couple went to Nabeul, a nearby town, and finally managed to have their marriage officiated.

Besides Zeineb and Sergio's case, at least two more mixed marriages were reported only in August by the Tunisian association for minorities.

In the last few months, a show of resistance has emerged among some notaries and municipal councillors who seem to be motivated by religious principles, and dispute that recognising inter-religious marriages runs counter to Islamic law.

The newly elected mayor of Kram, Fathi Laayouni, caused much debate in the middle of the summer after declaring that he would never authorise a marriage in his jurisdiction between a Tunisian woman and a non-Muslim.

When defending his position, the Tunisian mayor referenced to Article 5 of the 1956 Personal Status Code giving an ultra-conservative interpretation of the legislation.

"Article 5 sets out some impediments based on Sharia law, among them the marriage between a Muslim female and a non-Muslim male," he stated, "so we must refer to provisions of Islamic (Sharia) law."

Noting that Article 5 has not been recently revoked, Laayouni maintained that his duty is to make sure the law is duly applied. He argued that in order to avoid misinterpretations of the code, the article should be amended to refer to the "law", not Islamic law.

Alternatively, it should be made clear that the marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim is not listed in the impediments.

The mayor of Kram is convinced that those who oppose his stance are just few people who want to "destroy the Tunisian family and society" in the name of modernity.

“The majority of Tunisians are with me, many town halls are refusing to officiate these mixed marriages without a certificate of conversion to Islam from the male spouse,” he claimed.

Lawyers and politicians have said that Laayouni has breached the law and challenged the state.

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ETHIOPIA: ‘They believe I was cursed with blindness because God was angry’

Girls with disabilities in Ethiopia have been sexually assaulted and are feared for being under the spell of witchcraft.

By Ingrid Gercama and Nathalie Bertrams

Al Jazeera (24.09.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2Ikfbjn> – Newly elected Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has been praised for his recent negotiations culminating in peace with Eritrea, but still has to solve harsh realities at home.

Thousands of boys and girls with disabilities in Ethiopia are invisible in government statistics, unable to access health services, discriminated against by society and trapped in a cycle of poverty and violence.

A report from UNFPA and the Population Council highlights that one in every three girls living with disabilities has been sexually assaulted. They also face systematic and violent abuse at home and in their communities; they're blamed for being different and feared because they're seen to be under the spell of witchcraft.

Eniyat Belete, 17, has been blind since birth. In her village, as in many other towns all over Ethiopia, disability comes with a heavy stigma.

"They believe I was cursed with blindness because God was angry," explains the teenager.

Fisseha Arage Haile, himself blind, works as a special needs

and inclusive education expert for the South Gondar Zone Education Office.

He confirms that teenagers with disabilities are largely excluded from education, health and social welfare services. The Charities and Societies Proclamation (CSP) law makes it impossible for NGOs and other civil societies to operate in the country, which compounds the severe gap in service provision.

Specialised health and rehabilitation services are not accessible to the majority of the population and medical aids are expensive: crutches cost \$8 on average and a wheelchair costs \$224, unaffordable for most Ethiopians.

Only a fraction of children with disabilities are enrolled in formal education. Ethiopia, with a population over 100 million, only has 164 schools that serve students with hearing, visual and intellectual impairments. There are only two schools for students with autism, both of which are in Addis Ababa.

“There is still much work to be done until we can truly speak of an inclusive society,” Haile, an avid advocate of disability rights and changing the system from within, sighs: “As it is now, it is only inclusive by name.”

[See the article 'In Pictures'](#)

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BURKINA FASO: Botched FGM leaves 50 girls in hospital

Girls as young as four taken to hospital amid fears that cutters are targeting younger girls and crossing borders to avoid detection.

The Guardian (18.09.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2xjo88s> – About 50 girls, including some as young as four, are being treated in hospital in Burkina Faso after they underwent female genital mutilation.

Two women, along with some of the girls' relatives, have been arrested. Not all the girls who were cut have been traced, the minister of women's affairs, Laurence Marshall Ilboudo, told

the BBC.

The procedure is reported to have been carried out in Kaya, north-east of the capital, Ouagadougou. Voix de Femmes, an organisation that runs a centre on the outskirts of the capital for survivors, said it had assisted five girls, while many others were taken to local hospitals.

On Tuesday, campaigners in Somalia announced that a third girl had died in less than a week after undergoing FGM in the Puntland region. Suheyra Qorane Farah was cut along with her sister, Zamzam. Both bled profusely and fell into a coma. Zamzam's condition improved, but Suheyra's worsened. She was diagnosed with tetanus and died on 17 September.

Her death follows those of two sisters Aasiyo and Khadijo Farah Abdi Warsame, aged 10 and 11, last week in Somalia. The Somali government recently announced its intention to bring the first FGM prosecution in the country's history, following the death of a 10-year-old girl, but little progress has been made.

Hawa Aden Mohamed, executive director of the Galkayo Centre in Puntland, Somalia, which supports girls affected by FGM, said she hoped the deaths would "serve as a wake-up call for those responsible to see the need to have the law in place to protect girls from this heinous practice".

FGM has been illegal in Burkina Faso since 1996, making it one of the first African countries to outlaw the practice.

According to the UN's children's agency, Unicef, three-quarters of women aged 15-49 have undergone the procedure. The vast majority of people oppose FGM, Unicef says.

Jean-Paul Murunga, programme officer for ending harmful practices for the NGO Equality Now, said cutters are targeting younger girls because they are less likely to report it. "Previously, girls were cut at older ages like 13, 14, 15 and 16, but [the age] has now decreased because a girl of 13 and above is able speak out," he said.

School programmes that educate students about the dangers of FGM are making teenagers more likely to approach teachers for help.

However, charities fear that cutters and families are increasingly crossing the border with Mali, where there is no law on FGM, and Ivory Coast, where the law is not enforced as strongly. To avoid detection, those practicing FGM are also moving away from group ceremonies to individual cutting in private, the charity 28 Too Many said.

FGM is practiced across all regions, ethnic groups and religions in Burkina Faso. It is most common in rural areas, where insecurity often prevents civil society groups from reaching communities, Murunga said.

"In urban areas, the rates are lower because the infrastructure is much better, the police are more responsive and more proactive," he added.

He said FGM is becoming less prevalent in Burkina Faso but that prosecution rates remain too low. “The government has not been adequately budgeting the committee that is mandated to [raise] awareness, educate people, arrest and prosecute people who still practice this harmful culture,” he said. “That has meant that a lot of work is done by civil society organisations, which also are not very well resourced.”

Between January and June 2017, 51 people, including both perpetrators and accomplices, were prosecuted for performing FGM on 49 girls.

One recent case, in which 30 girls were cut, led to the arrest of a cutter and 14 others, including family members who had assisted or failed to report the crime. The cutter was eventually sentenced to four years’ imprisonment.

Murunga said he hopes the perpetrators in the case in Kaya are prosecuted and jailed: “This [will] send a strong message to the community that this practice has already been outlawed, and it is illegal and criminal as well.”

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INDIA: UN report says infant mortality rates lowest in five years, four-fold decline in gender gap in girl child survival

Opindia (18.09.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2MLB4sn> – The number of infant deaths reported in India for the year 2017 is the lowest in five years. According to reports, the United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UNIGME) has stated in its report that 8,02,000 infants died in India in the year 2017, the lowest in five years.

The UNIGME report states that in 2016, 8,60,000 infants had died in India. Yasmeen Ali Haque, the UNICEF representative in India has stated, " India continues to show an impressive decline in child mortality deaths, with its share of global under-five deaths for the first time equalling its share of childbirths."

Yasmeen Ali Haque also reportedly stated that the efforts for improving institutional delivery along with a countrywide scale-up of newborn care units joined with robust immunisation drives have been instrumental in achieving the feat. According to reports, India's infant mortality rate was 44 per 1000 live childbirths. In 2017, the gender-specific mortality rate has come down to 39 per 1000 live male childbirths and 40 per 1000 live female childbirths. Haque added that the four-fold decline in the gender gap in the survival of girl children is even more heartening.

In 2012, a UN report had stated that the gender gap in child mortality in India is far worse than the global average in developing countries and as girls have biological advantages over boys for better adaptability and resistance to diseases, the child mortality rate of 56 boys for every 100 girls dying suggests a disturbing socio-cultural trend of neglect and lack of care for the girl child.

The recent UNIGME report states that globally a total of 6.3 million children had died in 2017, 1 in every 5 seconds. Most of these deaths were due to preventable causes. A majority of these deaths, 5.4 million is among children below 5-years of age. Laurence Chandy, the director of data, research and policy in UNICEF has stated that simple measures like access to clean water, sanitation, electricity and vaccines can drastically reduce the numbers. Chandy added that over half of the 5.4 deaths among children below five had occurred in sub-Saharan Africa and a further 30% in South Asia.

The UNIGME report states that most children under 5 die due to preventable causes like complications during birth, pneumonia, diarrhoea, neonatal sepsis and malaria. The report also stated

that for children everywhere, the riskiest period is the first month after birth. 2.5 million of the 5.4 million deaths under were of infants in their first month. Even within countries, rural areas show a 50% higher rate in neonatal deaths than urban areas.

In India, the recent increase in awareness over sanitation and the government's drive to ensure toilets in every household is widely considered a strong factor in bringing down death rates among the population. A recent WHO report had stated that over 3 lakh deaths due to sanitation-related diseases were prevented in India due to the government's push for Swachh Bharat Mission. In Uttar Pradesh, an aggressive immunisation and awareness programme called Dasatk has been able to significantly bring down deaths due to Japanese Encephalitis. UNICEF India had praised UP CM Yogi Adityanath's government recently for successfully immunising every child in the state against Japanese Encephalitis.

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TUNISIA: Historic leap: Women make up 47 per cent of local government

UN Women (27.08.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2wwDSn5> – Seven years after the 2011 Revolution and four years after the adoption of the Constitution, women now make up 47 per cent of the local council positions in Tunisia following the May 2018 elections. The dramatic increase in women members is the result of a 2016 electoral law that includes the principles of parity and alternation between men and women on candidate lists for all elections.

In May, Ichrak Rhouma was elected to the Sidi Hassine Council in Tunis, the capital city. Prior to being elected, Rhouma participated in the Women's Political Academy, a joint project by UN Women and the Tunisian women's rights organization, Aswat Nissa (Women's Voices). The Academy trained women candidates on local governance, missions and roles of municipal councils, as well as media relations. Rhouma says that the Women's Political Academy "allowed us to deepen our knowledge on women's rights in general, but also to learn new concepts such as gender-sensitive budgeting."

In addition to the Academy, the project has conducted research on women's expectations of municipal council's activities in five regions across the country. The study's results informed candidates' electoral campaigns and shaped regional development planning.

Prior to the 2018 elections in Tunisia, UN Women and its civil society partners conducted capacity building sessions and supported the updating of the gender-sensitive election observation manual. UN Women also provided capacity building to 75 election observers who were trained on the importance of women's participation in elections and how to observe gender-related issues during the voting stages.

UN Women also supported the Tunisian League of Women Voters (LET) to run awareness-raising campaigns to increase voter participation, especially in the regions of Sousse, Bizerte and Nabeul, which had registered the lowest rates in 2012 elections.

"The objective was to invigorate a participatory democracy and political culture within women and youth. Our awareness campaigns trained and engaged young men and women who went door to door explaining the importance of women's participation in the political scene," explains Nejma Ben Kheher, Project Officer at LET.

Khedher added, "Now that we have this high number of elected women in local and regional councils, we hope to continue supporting them with targeted training, such as access to information or gender-responsive budgeting to help them succeed in their mission."

"The increased women's representation in the municipal councils offers an opportunity to impact territorial policies in Tunisia," said Leila Rhiwi, UN Women Representative in

Maghreb. “UN Women will continue supporting the councils to integrate gender concerns into their communal development plans that foster good governance and women’s leadership.”

Tunisia is one of the few countries in the world to establish the principle and practice of equal representation of men and women across candidate lists (horizontal parity – where women should head 50 per cent of candidate lists), as well as down the candidate lists (vertical parity – alternating men and women through the list), in its electoral law. While gender parity has been achieved regarding the municipal lists, according to the High Authority for Independent Elections, more work is needed to support horizontal parity, since women only made up 29.6 per cent of positions at the head of party lists.

Tunisia will hold its parliamentary and presidential elections in 2019.

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MOROCCO: Violence against women and sexual harassment criminalised

New bill imposes tougher penalties on various types of sexual violence and harassment, but critics say it falls short.

Al Jazeera (12.09.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2xb06Ce>– A new law in Morocco criminalising violence against women goes into effect on Wednesday, in what critics say is merely a first step in the right direction.

Approved by parliament on February 14, the bill imposes tougher penalties on perpetrators of various types of violence committed both in the private and public spheres, including rape, sexual harassment and domestic abuse.

Locally known as Hakkaoui law after family affairs and women's issues minister Bassima Hakkaoui, the legislation also declares the definition of sexual harassment, including unsolicited acts, statements or signals of a sexual nature, delivered in person, online or via telephone.

Along with harassment, there are also measures stipulating punishment for people who try to force someone into a marriage using violence or the threat of violence.

Those found guilty of violating the law face prison terms ranging from one month to five years and fines from \$200 to \$1,000.

While welcoming the law, critics say it stops short of addressing the full repertoire of crimes.

More specifically, the legislation does not explicitly outlaw marital rape or spousal violence, and does not provide a precise definition of domestic violence, leaving women vulnerable.

The law also fails in providing financial assistance for survivors and does not define the government's role in providing support and services to victims, Human Rights Watch group said in a press release.

Women violence

Violence against Moroccan women remains widespread and a largely taboo subject in the country, according to research data.

In 2009, a national survey reported that 62.8 percent of women had experienced physical, psychological, sexual or economic abuse.

Of the sample interviewed, 55 percent reported “conjugal” violence and 13.5 percent reported “familial” violence.

It also became a hot issue last August after a video was posted on the internet showing a young woman on a bus being sexually molested by a group of boys while the driver or others passengers failed to react to her appeals for help.

This sent shockwaves throughout the country and intensified calls for more to be done in the kingdom.

According to AFP news agency, about 1,600 cases of rape were heard by Moroccan courts last year, twice as many as previous years.

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