

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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