

MAURITANIA: Women raped risk jail for seeking justice – report

Sex outside of marriage in Mauritania is officially punishable by flogging, jail time, or in cases of adultery, death by stoning

By Nellie Peyton

Thomson Reuters Foundation (05.09.2018) – <https://tmsnrt.rs/2x4Jh68>– Women raped in Mauritania are discouraged from reporting the crime because they themselves can be jailed for having sex outside of marriage, a rights group said on Wednesday.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) interviewed five women and girls who were prosecuted for “zina” – sex outside of marriage – after reporting sexual assault, including a 15-year-old girl who had been gang-raped and was sent to prison, it said in a report.

Mauritania’s government spokesman did not respond to a request for comment. In a written response to HRW, the government said incidents of sexual assault are investigated by the judicial police, with almost 900 cases recorded since 2014.

HRW’s findings come as Mauritania awaits the results of legislative elections, which activists say offer parliament a

fresh chance to pass a draft law on gender-based violence that would increase support for rape victims.

“Despite the difficult picture at the moment ... there is an opportunity for change,” HRW researcher Candy Ofime told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The law has been pending before parliament for two years.

Mauritania, a vast desert country in northwest Africa, is an Islamic Republic with a penal code partly based on sharia law.

Sex outside of marriage is officially punishable by flogging, jail time, or in cases of adultery, death by stoning, although corporal punishments are not, in practice, carried out.

When HRW visited the women’s prison in the capital Nouakchott earlier this year, nine of the 22 prisoners were detained on zina charges, although it was not able to determine how many were victims of assault.

There is no national data on zina cases and it has become less common over the last two decades for rape victims to be charged with the crime, HRW said.

But the risk of prosecution remains high, with some civil society organisations advising rape victims who are over 18 or

pregnant not to go to the police, Ofime said.

“Mauritanian society doesn’t accept rape, and victims are often shunned and mistreated by their families,” said Aminetou Mint Ely, president of an association that runs support centres for sexual violence victims.

While civil society organisations provide emergency services to rape victims and women who have fled domestic violence, there are no overnight shelters in the country, said HRW.

“The thing that makes Mauritania an outlier ... is the absolute absence of the state when it comes to the provision of direct support services to survivors,” Ofime said.

.....

If you want to be regularly informed about different violations of human rights in the world, [click here](#) for a free subscription to our newsletters!

Also:

HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/womens-rights-gender-equality/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>