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Paris protesters march against deadly domestic violence towards women

By Angela Charlton and Thibault Camus

TIME (23.11.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2DhnRW8> - Several thousand protesters marched through Paris on Saturday to demand a national wake-up call and more government investment to prevent deadly domestic violence against women, a problem that President Emmanuel Macron calls "France's shame."

A wave of purple flags and signs snaked from the Place de la Republique through eastern Paris amid an unprecedented public campaign to decry violence against women — and honor the 130 women that activists say have been killed in France this year by a current or former partner. That's about one every two or three days.

While France has a progressive reputation and pushes for women's rights around the world, it has among the highest rates in Europe of domestic violence, in part because of poor police response to reports of abuse. Many of the women killed this year had previously sought help from police.

At Saturday's march, French film and TV stars joined abuse victims and activists calling for an end to "femicide." Many held banners reading "Sick of Rape."

The protest came on the U.N.'s International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and is aimed at pressuring the French government before it unveils new measures Monday to tackle the problem.

The measures are expected to include seizing firearms from people suspected of domestic violence and prioritizing police training so they won't brush off women's complaints as a private affair.

Some of Saturday's marchers want 1 billion euros in government investment, though the funding is expected to fall far short of that.

French activists have stepped up efforts this year to call attention to the problem, with an unusual campaign of gluing posters around Paris and other cities every time another woman is killed. The posters honor the women, and call for action. They also hold protests, lying down on the pavement to represent the slain women.

A 2014 EU survey of 42,000 women across all 28 member states found that 26% of French respondents said they been abused by a partner since age 15, either physically or sexually.

That's below the global average of 30%, according to UN Women. But it's above the EU average and the sixth highest among EU countries.

Half that number reported experiencing such abuse in Spain, which implemented a series of legal and educational measures in 2004 that slashed its domestic violence rates.

Conversations about domestic violence have also ratcheted up in neighboring Germany, where activists are demanding that the term "femicide" be used to describe such killings.

In France, lawyers and victims' advocates say they're encouraged by the new national conversation, which they say marks a departure from decades of denial. Women aren't the only victims of domestic violence, but French officials say they make up the vast majority.

French panel: Seize guns to reduce domestic violence

By Claire Parker

Associated Press News (29.10.2019) - <https://bit.ly/34qQ5cq> - A French government panel on domestic violence is urging authorities to begin confiscating guns from people following the first complaint of family violence levied against them.

That proposal was one of 65 recommendations released Tuesday to tackle the intractable problem of domestic violence in France, where a woman is killed by her partner every three days, according to government statistics.

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe launched the initiative in September. It's the first time that France has undertaken a comprehensive national effort to address domestic violence, according to Gender Equality Minister Marlene Schiappa.

Other proposals include mandatory reporting requirements for health professionals who witness signs of domestic violence and new protocols for police responding to domestic violence complaints. The experts also are encouraging awareness programs about gender violence, urging banks to make it easier for women to leave their partners, and educating children and adolescents about gender equality.

Schiappa said most of domestic violence killings in France are carried out with guns, arguing that if authorities take away the weapons that could reduce such deaths.

French law enforcement has received much criticism for failing to quickly and adequately respond to complaints of domestic violence. The government began to treat the issue with increased urgency after President Emmanuel Macron visited a domestic violence hotline in September and observed a police officer rejecting a woman's call for help.

Schiappa, who is overseeing the government commission, told a news conference Tuesday that the recommendations mark an important step toward "a system of zero tolerance" for all types of domestic violence.

The commission also urged greater awareness of the psychological effects of domestic abuse, including when women feel so trapped in a toxic relationship that they decide to kill themselves. In 2018, 217 French women died by suicide for this reason, according to lawyer and domestic violence specialist Yael Muller.

Schiappa said it is important to recognize "psychological violence" and "economic violence" as forms of domestic violence that are just as pernicious as physical blows. She described a case of a woman who was driven by her partner to jump out of a window.

"Does he bear no responsibility since he didn't physically push her? I don't believe so," she said.

"We still have an enormous amount to do to make progress against domestic violence, because for years, despite all the efforts of previous ministers, the number of femicides has not decreased," she said.

The government pledged 5 million euros (\$5.5 million) in September to create 1,000 shelters for female victims of domestic violence in 2020. An additional 1 million euros (\$1.1 million) will go toward anti-domestic violence initiatives.

The recommendations will now go to government ministries and France's National Assembly and Senate to consider making them into law. The commission will formally conclude its work on Nov. 25, the international day for the elimination of violence against women.

Watch: Protestors mark 100 domestic violence deaths in France in 2019

[100 deaths and counting: France's femicide problem](#)

By Vincent Coste & Lindsey Johnstone

Euronews (03.09.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2IYCF6A> - A demonstration was held in Paris on Sunday to denounce the 100th femicide in France this year, at which people held signs showing the names of the women killed by their partner or ex-partner between January and September 2019.

On Monday, a 92-year-old woman became victim number 101, when she died after being beaten by her husband with his cane.

In 2018, 121 women were killed in France by their partner or ex-partner, according to the Ministry of Interior.

Protesters on Sunday called on the French government to act, ahead of a meeting on domestic violence on Tuesday.

The national forum on domestic violence or "day of dialogue" – an initiative led by Marlene Schiappa, the French Secretary of State for Equality – was attended by police officers, lawyers, representatives of women's associations and the families of victims of femicide, with domestic violence prevention and victim support workshops planned.

Schiappa last week pledged €1 million for organisations tackling domestic violence, but the announcement has been met with criticism from such groups, who deem it inadequate.

Sunday's demonstration was organised by the feminist organisation *Nous Toutes* (All of Us), which is demanding the government prioritise the issue and allocate more funds to tackle it.

Chief executive Caroline De Haas tweeted: "They are [the] 100. Murdered because they are women. This evening, with *Nous Toutes*, we have named them. We are asking the state to wake up. We need funds and public policies that are up to the task."

Schiappa on Tuesday announced the creation of a new helpline 3919 – after the date of launch, 3/9/19 – and encouraged people to share it. She tweeted a message beginning "I'll be taken seriously when I'm dead" and went on to say: "Today, 3/9/19, at the coffee machine, at lunch, at the school gate, on the phone, on social networks... share 3919. You never know who might need it."

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced after the summit a raft of new measures including the creation of 1,000 additional places in emergency accommodation for women who are the victims of domestic violence and an audit of police handling of domestic violence. From November 25, women will be able to file domestic violence complaints at the hospitals where they have been treated for injuries inflicted, and legal powers to limit fathers' parental rights in the case of domestic violence, while still allowing the mother to receive alimony, will be introduced.

Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer also announced the creation of a working group focused on the prevention of domestic violence through education.

According to the NGO "Femicides par compagnons ou ex" (Femicides by partners or exes), a woman is killed by a partner or former partner every two days in France. The collective told Euronews last month that among those killed this year, many had already gone to the police about domestic violence issues but that their concerns had not been taken seriously.

The group also called on French authorities to take a new approach by removing violent men from their partners and families, rather than women and children being the ones to move to shelters. "They come out of a conjugal hell and are plunged into another kind of hell, while their violent partners are at home and can continue to harass them through the children because they retain their parental rights," they said.

According to a study by the Victims' Delegation of the National Police and National Gendarmerie, in 2018 21 children were also killed in the context of domestic violence. The study showed that the vast majority of domestic murders were carried out using a weapon and that 83% occurred in the home of the couple, the victim or the perpetrator. The most prevalent motive was non-acceptance of the separation of the couple.

France to end ban on IVF for lesbian couples and single women

PM Édouard Philippe set out reforms in state of the nation speech including green policies and a welfare clampdown

By Angelique Chrisafis

The Guardian (12.06.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Kg4AtD> - The French government intends to end discrimination over women's reproductive rights by lifting a ban that prevents single women and lesbian couples accessing medically-assisted procreation, the prime minister indicated in his state of the nation address.

Currently in France, only heterosexual couples who have been married or living together for more than two years can access procedures such as artificial insemination, IVF or sperm donation. In nearby countries such as the UK and Spain these procedures are open to all women.

For years, French equality groups have fought against what they have called blatant "sexist" discrimination against single women and women in same-sex relationships.

The French prime minister, Édouard Philippe, told parliament on Wednesday that the government's long-awaited legislation to give all women equal rights to medically assisted reproduction will be examined from the end of September.

He said he believed France had reached a point of being able to "calmly, profoundly and seriously debate" the issue. A number of legislators gave him a standing ovation.

France's highest bioethics body, the National Consultative Ethics Committee, ruled in 2017 that access to medically assisted reproduction should be expanded to include single women and lesbian couples. At the time, Emmanuel Macron's minister for gender equality called it "a matter of social justice".

But the bill was postponed several times amid fears it would spark mass protests by conservative campaigners. In 2013, the legalisation of same-sex marriage in France was unique among its European neighbours in sparking months of large street demonstrations, which saw violent clashes between far-right groups and riot police and led to a rise in homophobic attacks.

Under the current ban, thousands of single French women and women in same-sex couples have had to travel abroad to access donor sperm or assisted procreation in countries such as Spain, Belgium or Denmark.

The government's move to bring the legislation before parliament was part of planned reforms set out by the prime minister designed in part to win back leftwing supporters who have deserted Macron for parties such as the Greens.

Philippe said that the environment and "social justice" would be at the heart of policymaking between now and the end of the centrist president's mandate in 2021.

The prime minister promised a crackdown on waste and single-use plastic, saying the state should set an example by banning single-use items, such as plastic cups, cutlery and plates, from the state administration and ministries from next year.

But environmental campaigners said this was not enough. They have been pushing for France to act much faster than the EU's proposed ban on single-use plastic cutlery, cotton buds, straws and stirrers which is coming in by 2021.

In the wake of months of "yellow vest" street protests, Philippe said the government would press on with the president's plans to liberalise the French economy.

He said France will reduce generous unemployment benefits for high earners who are made redundant, and offer incentives to those who work beyond the normal retirement age of 62, in a bid to simplify the complex pensions system and reduce costs.

"Our country needs to transform itself. Our enemy is not action, it is the status quo," Philippe told parliament.

Misdemeanour or rape? Revised French bill on child sex sparks outrage

A bill initially aimed at tightening French child sex laws has been turned on its head and sparked widespread outrage, with critics accusing it of not only lessening the protection of children, but opening up a new legal loophole for child rapists.

France 24 (14.05.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2GjZpCm> - On Monday, a revised version of a government bill initially meant to clamp down on sexual offences and harassment went up for debate in French parliament, with lawmakers due to vote on its contents on Tuesday.

While much of the bill has been praised both at home and abroad for introducing on-the-spot fines for sexual harassment on the street, targeting cyber mobbing and extending the statute of limitations for child rape claims (from 20 to 30 years), the second of a proposed four articles, "Article 2", has caused child protection activists to see red.

The current law reads that today it is illegal in France for an adult to "have sexual contact" with a minor under the age of 15, but it is not considered rape. An initial draft of the bill proposed rectifying this by setting the minimum age of consent at 15, but this age of consent clause was quickly deleted after critics argued it would infringe on the defendant's presumption of innocence.

Open letter

On Monday, more than 250 renowned French psychologists, social workers, doctors, lawyers and celebrities signed an open letter to President Emmanuel Macron urging him to have the whole revised "Article 2" of the bill, which does not qualify sex with someone under 15 as rape, to be dropped altogether.

"We're very worried. We don't want another 'Pontoise'," they wrote, referring to last year's highly publicised case in which prosecutors refused to prosecute a man for rape after he, at age 22, had sex with an 11-year-old girl in a park. The main reason was that coercion couldn't be proved. Under the current law, all French rape convictions must contain proof of either violence, force, surprise or lack of choice.

The "Pontoise case" was then followed by a similar ruling where a 28-year-old man was convicted of the lesser crime of sexually abusing a minor after having sex with an 11-year-old whom he had lured to his apartment.

The two cases prompted public outrage and resulted in Macron's government vowing to reassess the country's child sex laws and providing the country's children with better protection.

Pascal Cussigh, a lawyer and president of the child protection group "Coup de Pouce", told FRANCE 24 that: "If you interpret the current text literally, an infant could consent to a sexual act involving penetration."

"We're one of the only countries in Europe who haven't adopted the principal of a minimum age for sexual consent. Last August, even Tunisia applied this principle with a very simple definition: 'Consent doesn't exist for children under the age of 16'," he said.

'Hard evidence' still needed

Cussigh, who is among those who signed the open letter to Macron, also criticised the fact that in the bill it is still up to the child to provide evidence that a rape has indeed taken place (through violence, force, surprise or lack of choice).

"So in essence, the bill doesn't change anything," he said.

In cases where so-called "hard evidence" cannot be presented by the alleged victim that a rape has taken place but there is enough proof to show that sexual penetration has in fact occurred, the government has proposed introducing the lesser crime of "sexual abuse of minors", which is considered a misdemeanour in France. The government hopes that this will lead to more convictions in child sex cases.

According to critics, however, this clause opens up a box of worms, because even if the intention is to avoid that a suspected rapist is acquitted just because of a lack of tangible evidence, many judges will feel prone to send suspected rape cases directly to the *tribunal correctionnel* -- which deals with misdemeanours -- rather than the criminal court, simply for the sake of saving time.

"It's counter-productive," Cussigh said, adding that "even if the suspect is convicted, the act might never be considered as having been non-consensual".

"For cases related to incest, there is no special treatment," he said. "A child victim of incest equally needs to prove that there was no consent at the time of the sexual act, even if they're only as young as eight years old," he said.

Dangers in not labelling rapists

Another problem is that if rapist is convicted for the lesser crime, the perpetrator may never be considered a rapist in the eyes of society, but a minor offender.

"Le Groupe F", which is behind the open letter to Macron, warned of the potential consequences the added misdemeanour clause could have on French society.

"Since 1810, rape has been considered a crime in France. By requalifying a crime as a sexual aggression or sexual assault that is thereby ruled a misdemeanour, it reduces the seriousness of the acts committed for both the victims and the perpetrators," it said.

The International Association of Incest Victims (AIVI) will stage a protest outside the National Assembly before lawmakers vote on the bill on Tuesday.

Court says man who had sex with 11-year-old girl must face rape charges

A French court said Tuesday that a 29-year-old man on trial for having sex with an 11-year-old girl must face rape charges, declaring itself incompetent to rule in the highly controversial case.

France24 (13.02.2018) - <http://bit.ly/2F56oQQ> - The man went on trial earlier Tuesday for sexual assault rather than rape in a case that triggered an outcry after prosecutors judged that the sex was "consensual", despite the girl's young age.

France does not treat sex between an adult and a minor as rape unless there is proof that force was used, and the government has vowed to introduce an age of consent.

The local court in the Paris suburb of Pontoise said after a day of closed-door hearings that the man should be put on trial for rape, pushing the decision to a higher court.

The girl's family were outraged by the initial decision not to try him for rape, and their lawyer Carine Diebolt hailed Tuesday's ruling as "a victory for the victims".

"There is no question of consent when we're talking about a child of 11 years," she had told reporters before the trial opened.

She has asked for the case to be adjourned and a rape charge to be applied, insisting that the child was shocked, intimidated and threatened by the defendant.

The father of two children, then aged 28, approached the girl in a public area of a housing estate in Montmagny northwest of Paris.

She performed oral sex in an elevator on the way to his apartment where they had penetrative sex.

His lawyer, Marc Goudarzian, cast doubt on the girl's testimony and insisted his client thought the girl was 17 because she had passed puberty. "She wasn't born yesterday," Goudarzian added.

In November last year, a man was acquitted of rape after having sex with an 11-year-old after a jury found no evidence that she had been forced into the relationship.

And in another widely publicised case in November, a teacher was given a suspended jail sentence, not a prison term, for having sex with a 14-year-old pupil.

President Emmanuel Macron, who is married to his former schoolteacher, has proposed a new law that would make 15 the age of consent.

More information: [Ages of Consent in Europe](#)

France to reassess child sex laws after controversial cases

BBC (13.11.2017) - <http://bbc.in/2AADIIV> - France is to consider a change to its laws around sexual consent, according to the minister for gender equality.

Marlene Schiappa said the government was considering setting a fixed age below which sex was automatically a serious offence.

It comes after two cases where men were acquitted of raping two 11 year old girls.

In France the age of consent is 15, but prosecutors still have to prove sex was non-consensual to prove rape.

In an interview with French television programme BFM Politique, Ms Schiappa said that as a member of the government she "could not react to court decisions".

But Ms Schiappa added she was looking at measures where "below a certain age...that there is no debate on the sexual consent of the child".

Despite its age of consent, France currently does not have any law which defines sex with someone below a fixed age as rape.

Currently in France if there is no violence or coercion proved, people may only be charged with sexual abuse of a minor and not rape - this has a maximum sentence of five years in prison and a fine of €75,000 (£66,000; \$87,000).

Sentences are the same for sexual assaults of minors and non-minors, but punishments for rape have much harsher sentences.

Ms Schiappa said her government was debating a defined age for irrefutable non-consent, between 13 and 15, as part of a new anti-sexism and sexual violence bill to be introduced in 2018.

What were the cases?

A public prosecutor said on Saturday that a 30-year-old man had been acquitted of rape after having sex with an 11-year-old girl in Seine-et-Marne in 2009 when he was 22.

The girl's family reportedly only found out about the incident after the girl became pregnant. Her child is now seven and is reportedly in foster care.

Local reports said the man's defense was that the girl had lied about her age to him.

Because there was no evidence of "threat or violence" a criminal court ruled that the man could not be charged with raping her.

It closely resembles a case in September which also prompted calls to change the law.

A 28-year-old man was acquitted when he was tried for having sex with an 11-year-old girl from Val-d'Oise, north of Paris. She reportedly followed the man home from a park, but prosecutors said there had been "no violence, no constraint, no threat, and no surprise" to constitute a rape charge - the court therefore ruled she had consented.

How does French law compare with elsewhere?

Age limits vary around the world, and exist to protect people who are not yet legally or emotionally competent to consent to sexual intercourse.

There is no official global limit for the age of consent but it tends to be about 16, and the UN's Human Rights body encourages countries to protect children from sexual exploitation.

In the US, the age of sexual consent varies by state but is between 16 and 18 years old. There are however "close in age exemptions" (so-called Romeo and Juliet laws) to allow for small age gaps in consenting sexual relationships, to protect people from being labelled as sex offenders where one party is slightly underage.

However, because of some legal loopholes, people below these ages still get married. An estimated 200,000 minors were married in the United States from 2000 to 2015.

Child marriage and laws that require people to marry their rapists can circumvent legal age consent limitations in national laws.

In the UK the age of sexual consent is 16, but children under the age of 13 have additional legal protections that declare they can never consent to sexual activity.

Other European countries like Germany and Portugal have a lower age of consent at 14.

French abortion bill would outlaw 'moral' pressure

By David Roach

BRNow.org (09.12.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2i0BPji> - A bill passed by France's Senate Dec. 7 that bans websites distributing "false information" about abortion could be used, pro-life activists say, to criminalize legitimate attempts to dissuade women from terminating their pregnancies.

The bill was approved 173-126, according to news reports, and must return to the lower house of parliament, the National Assembly, for final approval before advancing to Socialist President Francois Hollande.

The measure would extend to the internet a 1993 law outlawing "interference" with abortions through distribution of falsehood, according to the news website France 24.

Violation of the law would be punishable by two years in prison and a \$31,800 fine, CNS News reported.

Among other provisions, the bill would outlaw "trying to prevent" abortions by "disseminating or transmitting" electronic statements "looking to intentionally mislead" regarding the "characteristics or the medical consequences of a voluntary interruption of pregnancy," according to a translation posted by the conservative publication National Review.

When conservatives objected to the bill's original text, it was amended to outlaw "misinformation," suggesting accurate pro-life activism may still be permitted, the National Review stated.

Yet Grégor Puppinck of the European Centre for Law and Justice said misinformation is not all the bill bans. Its accompanying vague ban of "moral and psychological pressures" may "prohibit the church from publishing its position on abortion," he said.

"Publishing the Christian teaching that abortion is a crime could be seen as putting pressure on people," Puppinck said according to the Washington Free Beacon. "The simple sharing of information that might upset moral conscience could be sufficient to constitute a crime."

Puppinck added, "If you teach that [abortion] is a sin, [that] teaching itself" might be "sufficient for prosecution."

The law is aimed at least in part, according to CNS News, at the pro-life website IVG.net, which comes up in internet searches for "IVG", the French acronym for "voluntary interruption of pregnancy." IVG.net asserts that abortion carries medical and psychological risks.

The government website on abortion, ivg.gouv.fr, uses the slogan, "Abortion, your right," and mentions no risks associated with the procedure, World News Service reported previously. See related report.

Lawmakers clashed in debate leading up to the Senate's vote, France 24 reported.

Socialist Family Minister Laurence Rossignol said "freedom of expression should not be confused with manipulating minds," adding, "Thirty years ago militants chained themselves to abortion clinics ... today their successors are continuing this fight on the web."

Bruno Retailleau of the more conservative Les Républicains party said the bill is "totally against freedom of expression" while Health Minister Marisol Touraine, arguing in support of the bill, denounced a "cultural climate that tends to make women feel guilty" for seeking abortions.

A final vote on the measure in the National Assembly is expected in the coming weeks.

Further reading:

[French MPs vote to ban abortion websites that intimidate women](#)

[French politicians move to criminalize anti-abortion information](#)

I created the burkini to give women freedom, not to take it away

By Aheda Zanetti

The Guardian (24.08.2016) - <http://bit.ly/2c7ogvO> - When I invented the burkini in early 2004, it was to give women freedom, not to take it away. My niece wanted to play netball but it was a bit of a struggle to get her in the team – she was wearing a hijab. My sister had to fight for her daughter to play, had to debate the issue and ask, why is this girl prevented from playing netball because of her modesty?

When she was finally allowed to play we all went to watch her to support her and what she was wearing was totally inappropriate for a sports uniform – a skivvy, tracksuit pants, and her hijab, totally unsuitable for any type of sport. She looked like a tomato she was so red and hot!

So I went home and went looking for something that might be better for her to wear, sportswear for Muslim girls, and I couldn't find anything, I knew there was nothing in Australia. It got me thinking because when I was a girl I missed out on sport – we didn't participate in anything because we chose to be modest, but for my niece I wanted to find something that would adapt to the Australian lifestyle and western clothing but at the same time fulfil the needs of a Muslim girl.

So I sat down on my lounge room floor and designed something. I looked at the veil and took away a lot of the excess fabric, which made me nervous - would my Islamic community accept this? The veil is supposed to cover your hair and your shape, you just don't shape anything around your body. But this was shaped around the neck. I thought, it's only the shape of a neck, it doesn't really matter.

Before I launched it I produced a sample with a questionnaire to find out what people would think - would you wear this? Would this encourage you to be more active? Play more sport? Swim? A lot of people in my community didn't know how to accept this, but I developed it commercially and made a good business.

The burkini came to everyone's attention when Surf Lifesaving Australia introduced a program to integrate Muslim boys and girls into surf lifesaving after the Cronulla riots - they had a young Muslim girl who wanted to compete in an event. She wore a burkini.

After September 11, the Cronulla riots, the banning of the veil in France, and the international backlash that came with it - about us being the bad people all because of a few criminals who do not speak on behalf of Muslims - I really didn't want anyone to judge girls wearing these. It's only a girl being modest.

It was about integration and acceptance and being equal and about not being judged. It was difficult for us at the time, the Muslim community, they had a fear of stepping out. They had fear of going to public pools and beaches and so forth, and I wanted girls to have the confidence to continue a good life. Sport is so important, and we are Australian! I wanted to do something positive - and anyone can wear this, Christian, Jewish, Hindus. It's just a garment to suit a modest person, or someone who has skin cancer, or a new mother who doesn't want to wear a bikini, it's not symbolising Islam.

When I named it the burkini I didn't really think it was a burqa for the beach. Burqa was just a word for me - I'd been brought up in Australia all my life, and I'd designed this swimsuit and I had to call it something quickly. It was the combination of two cultures - we're Australians but we are also Muslim by choice. The burqa doesn't symbolise anything here, and it's not mentioned in the Qur'an and our religion does not ask us to cover our faces, it's the wearer's choice to do so. Burqa is nowhere in any Islamic text. I had to look the word up, and it was described as a kind of coat and cover-all, and at the other end you had the bikini, so I combined the two.

This negativity that is happening now and what is happening in France makes me so sad. I hope it's not because of racism. I think they have misunderstood a garment that is so positive - it symbolises leisure and happiness and fun and fitness and health and now they are demanding women get off the beach and back into their kitchens?

This has given women freedom, and they want to take that freedom away? So who is better, the Taliban or French politicians? They are as bad as each other.

I don't think any man should worry about how women are dressing - no one is forcing us, it's a woman's choice. What you see is our choice. Do I call myself a feminist? Yes, maybe. I like to stand behind my man, but I am the engine, and I choose to be. I want him to take all the credit, but I am the quiet achiever.

I would love to be in France to say this: you have misunderstood. And there more problems in the world to worry about, why create more? You've taken a product that symbolised happiness and joyfulness and fitness, and turned it into a product of hatred.

Also, what are the French values? What do you mean it doesn't combine with French values, what does that mean? Liberty? You telling us what to wear, you telling us what

not to do will drive women back into their homes – what do you want us to do then? There will be a backlash. If you are dividing the nation and not listening and not working towards something you are naturally going to have someone who is going to get angry. If you are pushing people away, and isolating them – this is definitely not a good thing for any politician to do, in any country.

I remember when I first tested the burkini. First I tested it in my bathtub, I had to make sure it worked. Then I had to test it by diving in it, so I went to the local pool to test that the headband would stay put, so I went to Roselands Pool, and I remember that everyone was staring at me – what was I wearing? I went right to the end of the pool and got on the diving board and dived in. The headband stayed in place, and I thought, beauty! Perfect!

It was my first time swimming in public and it was absolutely beautiful. I remember the feeling so clearly. I felt freedom, I felt empowerment, I felt like I owned the pool. I walked to the end of that pool with my shoulders back.

Diving into water is one of the best feelings in the world. And you know what? I wear a bikini under my burkini. I've got the best of both worlds.

France's tough stance on female genital mutilation is working, say campaigners

Parents and 'cutters' have been jailed in France but concerns remain that parents go abroad – including to UK – for FGM

By Kim Willsher

The Guardian (10.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2DSz27x> - The girls were ready to leave for London on Eurostar when French police arrived at the school gate to take them into care and their parents into custody. It is doubtful the cousins, both six, had been told why they were crossing the Channel. But activists campaigning against female genital mutilation (FGM) told the Guardian they had learned that the parents were planning to have them "cut", and tipped off the police just in time.

"We had to stop them going," said Isabelle Gillette-Faye of the Gams movement. "We were alerted by a family friend who knew what the parents were planning and was against mutilation. But we didn't have much time. We heard about it on the Thursday and they were travelling on Saturday morning. It was a close thing."

The story demonstrates France's zero-tolerance towards FGM, a tough approach that has jailed about 100 people in dozens of high-profile cases.

FGM was defined as a crime under French law in 1983 with the threat of 10 years in prison, or up to 20 years for cutting a girl under the age of 15. Parents who oversaw FGM were declared "accomplices" to the crime. The law also applies to parents who send French-born children abroad to be cut by making it a crime no matter where it is carried out. The first conviction was secured in 1988 against a father and his two wives, who were given three-year suspended sentences. In 1991, a cutter was jailed for five years. Two years later a mother was jailed for the first time, given a three-year sentence, two of which were suspended.

Linda Weil-Curiel is a lawyer who has been working to bring the cutters and parents to justice. So far there have been about 40 trials, an increasing number of which have ended in prison sentences.

"At first the African communities didn't want parents prosecuted, but it's against the law and the law is the same for all," she said. "We explain to doctors the importance of examining all children. In that way they can check not just for FGM but for sexual abuse."

Dr Emmanuelle Piet says tiptoeing around religious or social traditions has no place in the FGM debate.

"I've seen what FGM does and frankly I don't give a damn about cultural sensibilities. It's more important to prevent a violent crime being committed against a child or woman.

"People talk of culture and tradition, but children have a fundamental human right not to be mutilated. It's racist to think otherwise. Can you imagine the outcry if this was happening to white, blonde girls?"

Piet works in the north-eastern Paris suburb of Bondy, in the gritty Seine-Saint-Denis department, where roughly a quarter of the 53,500 population was born outside of France – the vast majority in former French colonies in Africa. As a gynaecologist, Piet sees many of the mothers and children at the mother and infant protection service, which offers free healthcare to children from birth to six. Among her patients are women who have undergone FGM in former colonies, including Djibouti and Mali, where Unicef says, respectively, up to 93% and 89% of women are cut.

"I ask if they want the same for their own little girl. Women and girls with mutilated genitals are often deeply traumatised and angry. I can see the fear and pain on their faces even before I touch them."

Gillette-Faye said the London-bound family were from a culture where "cutting is so ingrained they think they are doing the best for their daughters".

"The parents were very cultured, educated, professional, but it was completely normal for them to mutilate their daughters," she said. "A girl who wasn't cut wasn't considered normal or pure."

She added: "The parents wouldn't admit why they were travelling to London but we were told they were heading for a private clinic where the girls would be cut."

French doctors, hospital staff and teachers in areas of high immigration from countries where it is prevalent are trained by anti-FGM organisations to spot cutting and encouraged to report it.

As a result, Weil-Curiel, Piet and Gillette-Faye say they have seen no new cases of FGM carried out in France for a considerable time.

"We have a triple approach, preventing through education, shaming with publicity and punishing. It seems to work," Weil-Curiel said. "We see girls who are cut before they come to France, but we have not seen anyone cut in France for a while.

"You can be reasonably sure that a girl being taken away 'on holiday' during the school term to a country where FGM is rife is going to be cut," said Gillette-Faye.

"If we think this is going to happen, we call in the parents and examine the children. We explain why FGM is a crime and warn that we have recorded the child with nothing missing, so if she comes back cut then they will be prosecuted."

Piet admits parents still find ways around the law, but remains sceptical that many send their girls to the UK.

"FGM used to be carried out mostly on infants. Now girls who have been born and educated in France are being sent back to their parents' country, when they finish primary school, where they are cut and forcibly married. They return before their 16th birthday pregnant.

"When they come to see me. They are veiled, they are terrified and they are traumatised. They seem to have lost all their French education and language. It's like they have just arrived in a foreign country.

"They don't want to talk about it. As with other forms of violence, the aggressor warns them not to say what has been done to them."

French campaigners like such as Gillette-Faye, Weil-Curiel and Piet are incredulous of, and angered by, Britain's failure to tackle FGM.

"You have a tradition of multiculturalism, but you cannot accept everything in the name of tolerance, and certainly not the abuse of girls through mutilation and forced marriage," said Gillette-Faye.

"You have to tell parents cutting is not acceptable and if they don't listen you threaten them with prosecution and jail. It works."

The French former justice minister Rachida Dati summed up France's attitude, saying: "This mutilation has no foundation in any religion, philosophy, culture or sociology. It is a serious and violent abuse of a female. It cannot be justified in any way. FGM is a crime."