

Table of Contents

- ***Kuwaiti transgender woman's video sparks worldwide solidarity***

Kuwaiti transgender woman's video sparks worldwide solidarity

Maha al-Mutairi's allegations of police abuse go viral in Kuwait.

By Rasha Younes

HRW (10.06.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2UVnlX2> - As Maha al-Mutairi, a 39-year-old Kuwaiti transgender woman, made her way to a police station last Friday night, she decided to post a video. Maha had been summoned by authorities for "imitating women" – the fourth time she has faced this charge this year. In the video she posted, she said the police had raped her and beat her senseless while she was detained in a male prison for seven months in 2019, for "imitating the opposite sex."

During her detention in a police cell over the weekend, Maha's lawyer, Shaikha Salmeen, said that in an attempt to break Maha's spirit, police had told her: "People all over Kuwait are rallying against you." They could not have been more wrong. Instead, Maha's video sparked an international wave of solidarity on social media, with hundreds of activists mobilizing their connections, resources, and funds to protest her detention and ensure justice for Maha.

It worked. Maha was released on Monday night without charge. Her lawyer says Maha endured abuse during her three days in detention, including being spat on, verbally abused, and sexually assaulted by police officers who took turns touching her breasts.

In 2012, Human Rights Watch [documented](#) the negative effects on the lives of transgender women of a 2007 Kuwaiti law – an amendment to Article 198 of the penal code – which arbitrarily criminalizes "imitating the opposite sex." Transgender women have reported multiple forms of abuse at the hands of the police while in detention, including degrading and humiliating treatment, such as being forced to strip and being paraded around police stations, being forced to dance for officers, sexual humiliation, verbal taunts and intimidation, solitary confinement, and emotional and physical abuse that could amount to torture.

Eight years after our report, activists say discrimination and violence against transgender women has intensified. Justice for Maha, and for the many other trans women who have suffered the same fate, means investigating all allegations of police brutality and abuse, holding officers accountable for misconduct, and protecting trans people from violence.

After years of suffering in silence, Maha's story has mobilized international solidarity for trans women in Kuwait, and sparked a campaign to scrap discriminatory laws which harm them. The Kuwaiti National Assembly should repeal the amendment to Article 198, and should know that people all over the world are rallying not against Maha, but against its abusive practices.