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FRANCE: 'Finally': France seeks to establish age of consent at 15

France's government wants to set the age of sexual consent at 15 and make it easier to punish long-ago child sexual abuse, amid growing public pressure and a wave of online testimonies about rape and other sexual violence by parents and authority figures.

By News Wire

France24 (12.02.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3rMIgJQ> - "Finally!" was the refrain Wednesday from victims and child protection activists who have long pushed for tougher laws and greater societal recognition of the problem.

[France's](#) lack of an age of consent — along with statutes of limitations — have complicated efforts to prosecute alleged perpetrators, including a prominent modeling agent, a predatory priest, a surgeon and a group of firefighters accused of systematic [sexual abuse](#).

Calling such treatment of children "intolerable," the Justice Ministry said "the government is determined to act quickly to implement the changes that our society expects."

"An act of sexual penetration by an adult on a minor under 15 will be considered a rape," Justice Minister Eric Dupond-Moretti said Tuesday on France-2 television. Perpetrators could no longer cite consent to diminish the charges, he said, though exceptions would be made for teenagers having consensual sex.

The change still needs to be enshrined in law, but the announcement is a major step. "It's very good that there is this revived debate, that there is an idea of a minimum age (of consent), said Fatima Benomar, whose group Les Effrontees has pushed for stronger laws against sexual abusers. "This will make adults more responsible."

An effort to set France's [first age of consent three years ago](#) in the wake of the global [#MeToo](#) movement failed amid legal complications. But it has gained new momentum since accusations emerged last month of incestuous sexual abuse involving a prominent French political expert, [Olivier Duhamel](#). That unleashed an online [#MeTooInceste](#) movement in France that led to tens of thousands of similar testimonies.

The Justice Ministry is in discussions with victims' groups about toughening punishment of incestuous abuse and extending or abolishing the statute of limitations on sexual violence against children, because it creates such deep trauma that it can take decades for victims to speak out. The law currently allows child victims to file complaints until they are 48.

The ministry also says it wants “to ensure that victims of the same perpetrator do not receive different legal treatment,” which could broaden the scope to prosecute those accused of abusing multiple people over decades.

Legal time limits have hampered French authorities’ ability to investigate an influential cardinal, [Philippe Barbarin](#), convicted then acquitted of covering up for a predatory priest; modeling agent [Jean-Luc Brunel](#), an associate of disgraced late U.S. financier [Jeffrey Epstein](#), accused of an array of sex crimes; and surgeon [Joel le Scouarnec](#), convicted after accusations he sexually abused more than 300 children over decades, as well as other less-prominent cases.

One of Brunel’s alleged victims, former model Thysia Huisman, welcomed the proposed reform, even though it’s too late for her to seek justice for the rape she says she suffered as a teenager.

“It feels empowering, and that’s really important,” she said. “I thought nothing was ever going to change.”

Huisman came forward and testified to police in hopes of eliciting change and encouraging other alleged victims to speak out. “It’s really important to me, as a victim, a survivor, that we came forward as a group,” she said.

France’s highest court considered a case Wednesday involving a woman who said multiple firefighters raped her when she was between the ages of 13 and 15. A lower court downgraded the charges to sexual assault, but her lawyers want them reclassified as rape.

Under current French law, sexual relations between an adult and a minor under 15 are banned. Yet the law accepts the possibility that someone under 15 is capable of consenting to sex, leading to cases where an adult is prosecuted for sexual assault instead of rape, and therefore faces a lighter prison sentence.

In the Duhamel case, the Paris prosecutor opened an investigation into alleged “rapes and sexual abuses by a person exercising authority” over a child following accusations in a book by his stepdaughter that he abused her twin brother in the 1980s, when the siblings were in their early teens.

Duhamel, saying he was “the target of personal attacks,” stepped down from his many professional positions, including as a TV commentator and head of National Foundation of Political Sciences. The foundation manages the prestigious Sciences Po university in Paris, whose director Frederic Mion resigned this week amid the fallout from the affair, which entangled multiple people among France’s elite.

Since the Duhamel accusations surfaced, searing accounts of alleged incestuous abuse filled social networks. Other prominent figures in French cinema and politics have also been accused. The movement spawned an offshoot [#MeTooGay](#) wave in France of long-suppressed testimonies of sexual abuse by older men.

The [World Health Organization](#) says international studies show that one in five women and one in 13 men report having been sexually abused as a child.

WORLD: A report on conflict-related sexual slavery

***A report by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (2020)
See <https://bit.ly/2M9pVHr>***

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Executive summary

Conflict-related sexual slavery is a widespread, systematic, institutionalized, and deliberate human rights abuse committed by militaries under government supervision, state-sponsored militia groups, non-state armed groups, violent extremist groups, and criminal networks alike. Causing tremendous and long-lasting harm to women, girls, and entire communities, sexual slavery is used as a weapon of war, a wartime strategy, or a tactic of terrorism to recruit and retain fighters, fund operations, instill fear, destroy communities, and promote ideology.

The context in which conflict-related sexual slavery is occurring has evolved since World War Two. The rise of violent extremist groups and criminal networks has contributed to the widespread use of the bodies of women and girls as a form of currency in the political economy of war. Forced displacement, refugee crises, and humanitarian emergencies as a result of armed conflict have further exacerbated insecurity for women and girls, increasing their vulnerability to sexual slavery.

Survivors of sexual slavery are not a homogenous group—each individual experience is unique and affected by geography, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion, among other intersecting factors. Yet survivors across conflict contexts often face high levels of stigmatization and marginalization from their communities and families. In spite of this, many survivors have broken the barrier of silence and actively advocate for accountability and reparations from perpetrators, dispelling the narrative that survivors of conflict-related sexual slavery are passive victims without agency. In the absence of effective action taken by global and national policymakers to address conflict-related sexual slavery, survivors—with the support of women's civil society—call for accountability, justice, relief and recovery services, protection, and prevention of reoccurrence.

Although international human rights, humanitarian, and criminal laws and policies on preventing violent extremism and countering terrorism recognize and condemn conflict-related sexual slavery, significant gaps persist when it comes to consistent, coherent, and specific efforts at prevention, protection, accountability, and relief and recovery for survivors. The failure to address conflict-related sexual slavery through Bender-responsive peace processes, post-conflict resolution, and transitional justice mechanisms contributes to a reoccurrence of the crime, along with continued impunity for perpetrators and inadequate redress for survivors.

The Women, Peace, and Security resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council provide a critical framework to improve the global response to conflict-related sexual slavery.

However, it is essential to strengthen specific policies, provisions, and programming on conflict-related sexual slavery for the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security resolutions, including National Action Plans. Localization of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 is an important instrument to ensure that the needs of survivors of sexual slavery are met and to prevent the reoccurrence of the crime, through context-specific, survivor-centered conflict resolution initiatives developed in partnership with women's civil society.

The coinciding 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, and the 20th anniversary of the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal for the Trial of Japan's Military Sexual Slavery in 2020 present a critical opportunity to highlight the need to step up the response to sexual slavery, particularly justice and reparation for survivors as well as prevention efforts. It is a unique moment for survivors, women's rights organizations, and civil society groups worldwide to demand that the United Nations, Member States, regional organizations, the International Criminal Court, and the International Court of Justice take concerted action to end sexual slavery

in collaboration with civil society, the media, academia, faith-based institutions and other key stakeholders.

The Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), with support from the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), coordinated a global research to analyze historical and contemporary incidences of sexual slavery, from World War Two to the present geopolitical context. The overall goal of the research is to promote synergies in the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda, international humanitarian and human rights laws, and policies to prevent and counter violent extremism to improve the prevention of, protection from, accountability mechanisms for, and relief and recovery for survivors of sexual slavery. To ensure that this research reflects the voices of survivors of sexual slavery and women's civil society on the ground in conflict-affected communities, the research team produced three case studies: one on sexual slavery during World War Two in Asia and the Pacific, and two on more recent incidences of sexual slavery in Uganda and Iraq respectively. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions with survivors of conflict-related sexual slavery, women's rights activists, local and national government officials, human rights lawyers, and grassroots peacebuilders in Korea, Uganda, and Iraq, along with global policymakers were conducted.

This advocacy brief summarizes the key findings and recommendations of the global research and case studies. The full-length global research and case studies will also be made available. GNWP hopes that this research will inform and strengthen the global response to conflict-related sexual slavery and survivor-centered implementation of the WPS Agenda. Critically, this research will serve as a key advocacy tool for victims and survivors of sexual slavery and their families, and civil society activists.
