



Egypt: Stop sexual violence against women demanding their rights



Protesters campaigning in Tahrir Square; t-shirt slogan: "Voice it Out, Don't Be Silent." @Zain El Abdeen Fou'ad

Since the revolution of early 2011, women, including women's rights activists, continue to pay a steep price for demanding their rights. Seemingly organized mobs have been actively seeking out and attacking women campaigning in public spaces. Testimony from women and men who have gone to Tahrir Square to peacefully advocate for an inclusive and representative government exposes how women have been mauled by gangs, possibly coordinated by government officials, which they believe are aimed at discouraging women's participation and silencing their voices. According to a [report](#) of testimonies compiled by the Egypt-based New Woman Foundation, Nazra for Feminist Studies and the El-Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture, more than 20 women

were attacked on 25 January 2013 alone in and around Tahrir Square. This increase in the number of gender-based violent incidents occurring in public during political protests is extremely disturbing.

Egyptian journalist Hania Moheeb was one of the women sexually assaulted in January during an event commemorating the second anniversary of the uprising in Tahrir Square. She told Equality Now, "*In a few seconds the men who were all yelling with words that gave the impression they wanted to help me, started very quickly to use tens of hands over my body, stripping me from my clothes then violating the private parts of my body very aggressively.*"

Hania went on to explain how the authorities tried to persuade her to file a police report "later." It was only when her husband called human rights defenders to come and support her that the police took her statement. In an [interview with Al-Jazeera](#), she stated that, "*What happened to me was political, was organized, was systematic and definitely paid for by certain political groups who want to keep women away from the streets.*" Equality Now recently learned that several files from women claiming sexual assault were reportedly destroyed in a fire at the court offices in early April.

Government and law enforcement need to act swiftly and decisively to prevent violence against women, including in public spaces, to hold the perpetrators of any violence to account in a timely way, and to ensure that all Egyptian citizens are entitled to participate freely without intimidation or harassment in peaceful debate or demonstration about the future of the country. Recent reports state that President Morsi has begun a new "Initiative to support the Rights and Freedoms of the Egyptian Women," which includes addressing sexual harassment. Many members of the National Council for Women and other Egyptian women's right activists, however, boycotted the inauguration of the initiative because they see it as a purely political move. Equality Now and our partners will follow its development closely in the hope that it prioritizes taking action on the fundamental issue of violence against women.

Egypt is a party to a number of international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on

Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), all of which call for equality between men and women. In its concluding observations following its meeting with the Egyptian government in February 2010, before the revolution, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, tasked with monitoring implementation of CEDAW, called upon Egypt “to adopt[] comprehensive measures to address such violence [in the private and public spheres].” Women’s rights activists have said that since then the situation has deteriorated further. On 3 April 2013, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura, condemned the January attacks stating, “The Government and religious leaders of Egypt must send a clear and categorical signal that such vicious crimes of rape and other forms of sexual assault will not be tolerated,” noting that the perpetrators must be brought to justice.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Remind the authorities of Egypt’s obligations under CEDAW, the ICCPR and the ICESCR to provide equality between men and women, including freedom from gender-based violence. Please write to the Egyptian authorities listed below and urge them to:

- Stop the sexual violence and intimidation tactics being perpetrated against women advocating for their rights
- Properly investigate and fully prosecute any sexual assault whether occurring in public or in private
- Develop processes for the comprehensive inclusion of women’s voices in all governmental and administrative processes

Letters should go to:

- President Morsi, El Etahadiya Presidential Palace, Merghiny St., Heliopolis, Cairo, EGYPT
Fax & Tel.: +202 239 019 980; Twitter: @EgyPresidency, @MuhammadMorsi
- Prime Minister Mr. Hesham Qandil, Magless El Shaàb Street, Al Kasr El Einy, Cairo, EGYPT
Tel.: +202-2793-5000, Fax: +202-2795-8048, Email: pm@cabinet.gov.eg
- Minister of Justice Counselor Ahmed Mekki, Lazoghly Square, Cairo, EGYPT
Tel.: +20227922263, Fax: +20227958103, Email: mjustice@moj.gov.eg

Please keep Equality Now updated on your work and send copies of any replies you receive to:

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Equality Now, P.O. Box 2018 - 00202, Nairobi, KENYA, Fax: +254-20-271-9868; or
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