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Egypt law-makers blame women victims for sexual violence

Amnesty International condemns comments by Egyptian members of parliament which blamed women protesters for a recent spate of sexual assaults in Cairo's Tahrir Square.

The remarks were made on Monday during a session of the Human Rights Committee of the Shura Council, Egypt's upper house of Parliament.

Members of the Committee were reported to have said that women had brought the attacks upon themselves by attending the protests; that they bore responsibility for the attacks; and that women should not mingle with men during demonstrations.

The remarks reveal deep-seated discriminatory attitudes that throw into question the authorities' determination to eliminate sexual violence.

Amnesty International has expressed particular concern that such attitudes were voiced in the Shura Council, which in the coming months is likely to be asked to consider new legislation to tackle sexual- and gender- based violence.

The organization has said it is difficult to see how an effective law to combat sexual violence could be passed by law-makers who believe that women are to blame.

Amnesty International urges the Egyptian authorities to publicly condemn all sexual harassment and gender-based violence.

A clear and unambiguous message is needed that women are not responsible, and that they have the rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

Egypt is a state party to international human rights treaties which prohibit all forms of discrimination, including on the basis of gender and requires the authorities to ensure gender-equality.

In particular, under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Egyptian authorities are obliged to ensure officials refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women.

In a [briefing documenting the attacks](#) published 6 February 2013, Amnesty International called on the Egyptian authorities to order independent investigations into the attacks in Tahrir Square, and ensure the perpetrators are found and brought to justice in fair trials.

BACKGROUND

Violent sexual assaults against women, including rapes, have surged in the vicinity of Cairo's iconic Tahrir Square in recent months.

They peaked on 25 January 2013 during protests commemorating the second anniversary of the start of the 2011 uprising that ousted President Hosni Mubarak. The attacks have been carried out by groups of men and have lasted from a few minutes to over an hour.

The remarks by members of the Shura Council came just days after controversy over similar statements by Ahmad Mohamed Abdullah (known as Abu Islam), the owner of the Al-Ummah television station.

In a video posted on-line on 6 February, Abu Islam said that women protesters had gone to Tahrir Square because they wanted to be raped, and that such women were “devils”. The comments attracted widespread condemnation.