

## EGYPT: Egyptian Women Angry After President's Advisor Says Harassment

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Egyptian women are livid after an advisor to President Mohamed Morsi said that statistics on sexual harassment and sexual violence in the country are "exaggerated." Omaima Kamel, on the Board for Women's Affairs, said on Wednesday that the Interior Ministry should "provide realistic numbers" on violence against women in the country.

She argued that the ministry was the "only competent authority to monitor violations that occur in the streets," during a meeting convened within the presidential initiative to "support rights and freedoms of Egyptian women."

But women's rights activists are fighting back, telling Bikyanews.com that Kamel lives "in another world." Sara, a 35-year-old producer and activist, said that "the ministry is complicit in the ongoing sexual violence and attacks against women so how could a so-called 'advisor' want them to deal with giving real statistics?"

She added that it was "the most ignorant thing we've heard in Egypt in a while and we've heard a lot."

The "Initiative for supporting the rights and freedoms of Egyptian women" is a four-month long conference that holds six workshops that discuss the promotion of women's rights and freedoms.

The first workshop discussed sexual harassment, in terms of legislation and societal confrontation.

The meeting discussed implementing the recommendations of the first workshop on the psychological, educational, and legal levels, reported the Middle East News Agency.

The National Council for Women had proposed a draft law to counter all forms of violence against women.

Meanwhile, the "I Saw Harassment" initiative criticized the lack of security in the streets. It attributed the delayed reconstruction of the Interior Ministry and the non-improvement of security services to the increase of sexual violence crimes against women and girls in Egypt.

In April, the United Nations called on Egypt's government to ensure that women in the country are protected and are able to be safe on the streets of their own country.

"Egypt's story in the post-revolutionary period cannot be that of a country whose women marched in support of democracy, only to find their own freedoms denied, their lives directly threatened, and their vibrant political activism stamped out in a climate of fear and insecurity," said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura.

"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," Ms. Bangura added in a statement, noting that security forces must take immediate measures to investigate these "despicable acts," and bring the perpetrators to justice.

At least 25 women were reportedly sexually assaulted in Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo in late January, some violently, according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The demonstrations coincided with the second anniversary of the Egyptian revolution when mass protests toppled then President Hosni Mubarak and led to a transition period in the country, which was part of a larger group of movements in the region known as the Arab Spring.

In addition to the attacks in January, there had been a number of well publicized incidents of sexual assault in Tahrir Square over the past 18 months, according to the former head of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), Michelle Bachelet.

She and the High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay were among senior UN officials who condemned the attacks and urged authorities to strengthen security measures, as well as to investigate the reported attacks.