

Women in post-revolutionary Egypt must be free from fear of sexual violence – UN envoy

April 3, 2013

UN News Centre

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=44546&Cr=Egypt&Cr1=#.UV1x90L3Ay5>

A United Nations envoy today expressed dismay at the sexual attacks on women protesters in Egypt, as well as the messages from prominent religious and political leaders that women are to blame.

“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.

In today's statement, Ms. Bangura noted that rape and sexual assault remain "vastly underreported" particularly in environments where there is conflict or political strife.

"As more information is coming to light on the numbers of women who have been raped and sexually assaulted, we are concerned that this is only the tip of the iceberg, since this phenomenon generally remains largely invisible," she said.