

**Date: 10 June 2014**

**Country: Algeria**



The law allows rapists to walk free if they marry their victim – if she is under 18 years old. This is the case in Algeria and Tunisia. According to [statistics](#) in Algeria, more than 1,000 sexual assaults on women are recorded per year. Experts believe that these figures do not reflect the reality as many victims are too afraid or ashamed to report the crime to the police.

A conference on sexual violence against women in Algeria, which was held on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2014, was organised and executed by the Media Diversity Institute, in cooperation with “Femme en Communication” and “Reseau Wassila”. These organisations fight for greater gender equality in the country. Throughout the conference, many social taboos were challenged and a sincere discussion on this important issue took place.

Panellists spoke openly about rape, marital rape and incest. They called for the need to organise more events to raise awareness and put pressure on policy makers to change the law. Allowing accused rapists to walk free by marrying their victim, if she is a minor, is an [exam](#)

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the legal provisions that still exist in certain countries such as Tunisia and Algeria.

“It is very important to revise the law in order to simplify access to the courts for abused women. The existing laws go back to 1962 and are outdated,” said the lawyer Fatma Zohra Ben Brahem. She added that some abused women who attempt to sue their attackers are discouraged by their families or even by security services.

In addition to emphasising the need to improve Algerian legislation, which remains ambiguous regarding the definition of rape and other acts of sexual violence, speakers said that society must change and consider the abused woman as a victim and not as the one responsible for what has happened. Presenting alarming figures on cases of sexual violence, panellists also underlined the need for civil society and media to engage more in order to fight this increasing trend. A video, made by MDI trainees, was screened before the debate. The video showed women, who had suffered different types of sexual abuse, sharing their experiences.



The conference was covered by four TV stations, two national radios and many newspapers, which published stories about the debate and applauded the initiative of opening up a

discussion on a sensitive topic for Algerian society. Prior to the event, JIL FM Radio, one of the most prominent radios for youth in the country, invited representatives from Femmes en Communication and Réseau Wassila to speak about the conference. They also spoke a little about the need to promote awareness of this increasing issue and to protect victims through the establishment of better legislation.

The event was attended by more than 150 people. The majority of attendees were women from the civil society, media and representatives of international organisations (UN Women, UNAids, UNFPA, US Embassy, NDI, GIZ and Amnesty International). The event raised a lot of awareness and helped start campaigns such as the Amnesty International "Forced Marriage to your rapist is not justice" petition. Overall, the event was a success and highlighted key issues that needed to be addressed.