

[A counselling service tackles scourge of harassment in Egypt](#)

Fri, 2019-11-01 22:58

CAIRO: Abuse of women and children is a topic that has long been silenced or tabooed in many cultures worldwide, including in the Middle East.

Social entrepreneur Laila Risgallah has made it her life's work to try to stem the blight of abuse in her native country Egypt.

Violence against women is rampant in the most populous Arab country. A 2013 UN study revealed that 99.3 percent of Egyptian women had experienced harassment in some form.

About a decade ago, Risgallah founded Not Guilty, an education and counselling service with a mission to stop the abuse and bullying of children and adolescents.

"Violence against females is based on pervasive and deep-seated beliefs and behaviors, making it difficult to root out with legal penalties or superficial changes in society," she said.

According to research by the Population Council, nearly two-thirds of Egyptian men surveyed admitted to harassing women, and nearly 80 percent of Egyptian males aged 15–29 said a woman who is harassed "deserves it."

Just over 70 percent of women in the same survey said "immodestly dressed" women deserve being abused.

"Child sexual abuse occurs at all socioeconomic levels, across all ethnic and cultural lines, within all religions and at all levels of education," said Risgallah. "By making sure that we're educated and informed on this issue, we can prevent children from going through this heinous experience."

Through training held by Not Guilty in schools, she discovered that up to 15 percent of children have been exposed to abuse.

But as little as 10 percent of overall abuse cases are reported due to the shame, guilt and stigma associated with reporting, Risgallah said.

With the issue of abuse being so complex and endemic in society, she believes that ending harassment will not be achieved simply by implementing sterner laws. "Prevention is always easier, better and less costly than rehabilitation and treatment," said Risgallah

"Our goal is to raise a generation of kids, youth, parents, leaders and teachers who hate, refuse and fight abuse," she said.

"Not Guilty is working toward achieving this goal through raising awareness of the dangers and consequences of sexual harassment in order to achieve a

safe environment.”

Risgallah, who has a Ph.D. in childhood studies and a bachelor’s degree in psychotherapy, said the sentiment of her organization is crystalized in its name. “The name realizes and underlines that abuse has never, ever been the victim’s fault,” she said.

Not Guilty uses a three-pronged approach to address abusive relationships.

The NGO trains children aged 3-18 on how to respond if abuse happens, advises parents on how to protect their children against abuse, and shows teachers and caregivers how to spot abuse and what to do if a case is reported.

“Pre-training children is a unique approach since most people work on sexual abuse after it happens,” Risgallah said.

“Most schools hold earthquake drills and fire drills, so why not hold an anti-sexual abuse drill?”

Not Guilty trains children on how to protect themselves through the interactive program SKIT, using songs, skits, games, coloring and puppets.

Risgallah said her organization faces constant opposition from stakeholders on all sides. “People don’t know that sexual abuse is rampant, and if they do know, they don’t think it’s such a big deal,” she added.

“The damage wrought by sexual harassment is never spoken about. It’s a taboo subject, so it’s hardly ever reported,” she said.

“Wherever we go – whether we go to schools, nurseries, orphanages or other non-profits – we’re greeted with the same words: ‘We have no cases of sexual abuse here’.”

But Risgallah has no plans to give up on changing attitudes in Egypt and beyond anytime soon.

Not Guilty has so far trained more than 9,000 children and teens, 4,000 parents, 1,000 teachers and 230 factory workers – both male and female. The NGO also continues to provide counselling and support services for victims of abuse.

“Children need to know that they’re not alone if they face sexual abuse,” Risgallah said. “We’re witnessing a true impact and change in many parts of the world.”

- *The Middle East Exchange is one of the Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Global Initiatives that was launched to reflect the vision of the UAE prime minister and ruler of Dubai in the field of humanitarian and global development, to explore the possibility of changing the status of the Arab region. The initiative offers the press a series of articles on issues affecting Arab societies.*



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[Laila Risgallah](#)

[Editor's Choice](#)

Saudi Arabia pledges to fight child abuse during UN meeting
Al-Azhar launches child abuse campaign after young girl's death sparks outrage in Egypt

[**'Biggest terrorism sponsor' Iran**](#)

spends \$1 billion a year on global proxies: US report

Author:

Reuters

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1572629409345761600

Fri, 2019-11-01 17:17

WASHINGTON: Iran remained a top state sponsor of terrorism around the world in 2018, the State Department said in its annual terrorism report on Friday. A briefing by the department's counter-terrorism spokesman Nathan Sales showed the regime funnels nearly a billion dollars a year to support its proxies in the region despite Washington having significantly ramped up its sanctions against Tehran.

The report also showed global presence of Daesh continued to advance in 2018 through networks and affiliates, even though the Trump administration declared it defeated the jihadi group in Syria and killed its leader last month in a US raid.

Terrorism tactics and the use of technologies have also evolved in 2018, while war-hardened fighters from groups such as Daesh returning to their home countries began raising fresh threats, the report said.

Today, [@StateDeptCT](#) Ambassador Nathan Sales briefed the media on the release of the Country Reports on Terrorism 2018. Watch his full remarks. <https://t.co/re88smFd4I> #CRT2018
<pic.twitter.com/2jNTN1epTF>

– Department of State (@StateDept) [November 1, 2019](#)

“Even as Daesh lost almost all its physical territory, the group proved its ability to adapt, especially through its efforts to inspire or direct followers online,” said Sales using an acronym for Daesh, the US counter-terrorism coordinator, whose office produced the congressionally mandated report.

“Additionally, battle-hardened terrorists headed home from the war zone in Syria and Iraq or traveled to third countries, posing new dangers,” he said. Daesh declared its so-called “caliphate” in 2014 after seizing large swathes of Syria and Iraq. The hard-line group established its de facto capital in the Syrian city of Raqqa, using it as a base to plot attacks in Europe.

In 2017, Daesh lost control of Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria, and quickly thereafter almost all of its territory as a result of operations by US-backed forces. Its leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, was killed last month in Syria in a raid by US Special forces.

World leaders welcomed his death, but they and security experts warned that the group, which carried out atrocities against religious minorities and horrified most Muslims, remained a security threat in Syria and beyond.

The group on Thursday confirmed his death in an audio tape posted online and said a successor, identified as Abu Ibrahim Al-Hashemi Al-Quraishi, had been appointed. It vowed revenge against the US.



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US targets Iran construction sector with new sanctions
US and Gulf countries sanction individuals and businesses linked to Iran and Hezbollah

[Lebanese man sentenced to death in 2013 mosque bombing](#)

Author:

AP

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1572627206855627200

Fri, 2019-11-01 16:50

BEIRUT: A Lebanese court has sentenced a man to death for twin car bombings in 2013 that targeted two mosques in the northern city of Tripoli, killing 47 people.

State-run National News Agency says the Judicial Council sentenced Youssef Diab on Friday.

NNA gave no further details regarding the sentence over the near-simultaneous bombings that targeted Sunni mosques in Lebanon's second largest city. Police said at the time that the bombings wounded some 300 others.

The coordinated bombings in the predominantly Sunni city came amid sectarian violence in Lebanon at the time that spilled over from neighboring war-torn Syria.

According to the indictment released years ago, Diab detonated one of the bombs remotely.



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Lebanon sentences UK diplomat's murderer to death 'Loyal' Tripoli turns its back on Lebanon's Hariri

Turkey drafting law to restrict powers of Istanbul municipality

Author:

Fri, 2019-11-01 01:28

ANKARA: The Turkish presidency is drafting a law that will remove power from the opposition-held Istanbul metropolitan municipality. Many suspect that the motive behind the legislation is retaliation against Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, the Nation Alliance candidate who won office in a landslide victory in June against Binali Yildirim, the candidate from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).

According to local press reports, the new law – currently being prepared by the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning – will shift jurisdiction over development along the Bosphorus from the Istanbul metropolitan municipality to a “Bosphorus presidency” whose members will be appointed by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and will also restrict the municipality’s power to make amendments to development plans in the city, allowing the Bosphorus presidency to assign the city’s “green areas” – effectively allowing it to decide where construction can or cannot take place in Istanbul.

“The unilateral transfer of powers to the presidency illustrates just how imbalanced Turkey’s division of power is,” Nate Schenkkan, director for special research at US NGO Freedom House, told Arab News.

Turkey’s once-booming construction sector, which is seen by many as one of the main factors behind the AKP’s uninterrupted electoral success, has come to a grinding halt in recent months, mainly due to the collapse of the Turkish currency. A number of planned urban-redevelopment projects, slated to run into billions of dollars, are now in need of government subsidies to remain viable.

For 2019, Erdogan had promised to start the construction of a 43-km canal near Istanbul, along with a number of new towns along its banks. The opening of Istanbul airport last year was also seen as a megaproject intended to back the ailing construction sector.

Supporters of the new draft law say it will resolve confusion about overlapping authorities and help combat illegal housing in the city.

But Imamoglu has strongly criticized the draft law, telling Euronews that the municipality will “claim its rights” if the law passes.

Schenkkan believes that is likely. “The judicial system is also under strong presidential influence, which grows by the month as the president has more opportunities for appointments,” he said. “So successfully challenging (it) in the courts is a difficult task.

“Under the new constitution, the president can essentially transfer powers to himself and then dare other institutions to have it overturned in the courts. Combined with the continued use of trustees to replace mayors in the southeast, this shows the limits of the opposition’s success at the local level in this year’s elections,” he continued.

In mid-August, trustees were appointed to four pro-Kurdish HDP municipalities in Turkey’s southeast, because of the areas’ alleged links to terrorism. The mayors of Diyarbakir, Mardin and Van, all from the HDP, were suspended over suspected terror links, and there is mounting speculation that Imamoglu could also be removed from office.

According to Seren Selvin Korkmaz, cofounder and executive director of the independent StanPol Institute in Istanbul, the government’s attempts to centralize power and remove responsibilities from local municipalities is typical of the AKP.

“The ruling AKP has followed a neo-liberal populist agenda combined with increasing nepotism and clientelism,” she told Arab News. “It is (obvious) that the loss of major cities including Istanbul, Ankara, and İzmir is a major blow for AKP’s rent-seeking economy.”

Korkmaz also added that the ruling party had been in charge of the country’s largest cities and central government for almost two decades, and had used urban space and municipality services to establish rent mechanisms that best suited it.

“Commodification of land, urban transformation projects and clientelist redistribution mechanisms created a chain of patronage relationships which ensure continuous support (for the AKP),” she said, adding that the AKP’s losses in recent local elections meant that chain’s “flawless mechanism” had been broken.

Korkmaz said that while the Bosphorus area is clearly an attractive proposition for developers looking to construct high-yield rental accommodation, the government’s plans could backfire if it continues to remove power from local non-AKP authorities – a move that could strengthen the opposition’s “victimized position” and unite supporters of the opposition parties.

“That always has the potential to turn the vote in Turkish politics,” she said. “Also, it may compel the opposition to be more creative in its strategies for reaching voters.”



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Turkey releases 18 Syrian soldiers captured in Syria
Turkey summons US ambassador, condemns House resolutions

[Frontline clashes ebb and flow as Libya's war hits impasse](#)

Author:

Fri, 2019-11-01 01:22

On the outskirts of Tripoli, days of silence are broken by bursts of heavy artillery fire. Fighters camped out for weeks in abandoned houses watch for movement on enemy lines. A drone buzzes overhead and strikes, causing brief panic.

The nervy ebb and flow of the battle for Libya's capital shows no sign of changing soon.

Nearly seven months after Commander Khalifa Haftar launched an offensive against the city, the war has reached an impasse that foreign support on both sides has failed to unlock.

Thousands of people have been killed in sporadic fighting since 2014 between factions in the east and west. The violence has allowed militants and migrant smugglers to flourish, hit Libya's oil industry and divided the country's key institutions.

Leaders on both sides appear to be ruling out compromise.

FASTFACTS

- Battle for Tripoli began in April, upending peace push.
- Frontlines beyond buffer zone have rarely shifted.
- Both sides dependent on foreign drones.

For those in Tripoli, Haftar must withdraw to his stronghold in the east before any cease-fire.

"We hope this war ends today, but the political leadership clarified that for talks on a cease-fire the invader should return to where he came from," Osama Al-Juweili, a top military commander of forces aligned with the internationally recognized government in Tripoli, said in an interview.

Haftar has said he is willing to seek a political solution but only once the capital is rid of the armed groups that provide the Tripoli government with its core support.

Lacking momentum to bring local groups to his side, Haftar may be playing a long game, waiting for splits among previously fractured forces fighting against him, said Tarek Megerisi, a policy fellow at the European Council of Foreign Relations.

"The state of war that they're in is becoming more normalized," he said. "That makes further wars more likely."

Shifting alliances

Forces on both sides are drawn from locally based armed groups that have made up Libya's shifting alliances since the NATO-backed uprising that overthrew Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.

Those fighting with the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli were often at odds before this year's war mobilized them against Haftar, whom they accuse of seeking to return Libya to one-man rule.

Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) has extended its reach through tenuous local alliances, and struggled to control parts of the east despite support from abroad.

UN experts said much of that backing came from the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, and Haftar has been received on official visits by both. The UAE and Egypt have either not responded to UN requests for information or denied material support.

Reluctant to engage in full-blown combat and risk heavy casualties, both sides have looked to foreign backers to turn the tide in their favor around Tripoli by deploying drones with precision-guided missiles.

Turkey has provided and operated Bayraktar drones for the Tripoli government, while the LNA uses Chinese-made Wing Loon drones operated by the UAE, analysts and diplomats say.

Emirati and Turkish officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Mobilizing for a major operation is made harder because of the threat from the air, said Megerisi.

A drone strike witnessed by Reuters reporters earlier this month hit close to a checkpoint in south-eastern Tripoli, on the edge of a buffer zone where most civilians have been evacuated.

Men in military uniforms near a burning vehicle frantically waved people away for fear of a follow-up strike as ambulances rushed to the scene, but within an hour nearby streets had returned to normal.

Civilian casualties

Life in central Tripoli continues largely as before, though the fighting has strained a city worn down by years of turmoil.

More than 100,000 people have been displaced from the city's outskirts.

Scores of civilians have been killed and maimed as both sides try to pick off targets in residential areas, often using inaccurate, decades-old rockets and artillery, rights group Amnesty International said in a report last week.

Wary of foreign meddling, many Libyans have lost hope the conflict can be resolved internally.

"Libyans don't understand each other," said Mariam Ali, a 26-year-old teacher walking with a friend in the city center. "There's no solution in Libya."

The offensive by Haftar, a former general under Qaddafi who lived in the US and gained citizenship there before returning to Libya in 2011, upended a diplomatic peace push.

He launched his campaign on April 4, but its slowing momentum has raised

questions over his military capability and future, analysts and diplomats say.

Path to peace unclear

Juweili said private military contractors from Russia had been killed in a recent, failed attempt to cut the road to Azaziya in southern Tripoli. Their journey into Libya and to the frontline by air and through Syria had been tracked, he added.

An LNA spokesman denied the presence of Russian fighters in its ranks, and the use of any foreign aircraft.

Haftar's forces have expressed confidence that they can still achieve a swift victory.

Tripoli commanders counter that they have centralized their military operations, and could mobilize thousands of extra fighters if needed.

If Haftar took Tripoli, "he would be left in charge of a raging insurgency and insurrection," said a senior US diplomat. "I think even a number of his patrons have great concerns about what it would actually mean for him to 'win'."

The path to political negotiations is unclear.

An international conference on Libya is expected in Germany, though preparations have been slow and no date has been announced.

Western diplomats say the aim is limited to trying to persuade the UAE, Egypt and Turkey to deescalate the conflict.

"I'd say the dynamic is to get people to act in the spirit of enlightened self-interest, and there's nobody in a position to bludgeon anybody into changing their behavior right now," the US diplomat said.



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Rival Tripoli government restricts Libya's oil revenues: Benghazi-based PMLibya coast guard intercepts dozens of Europe-bound migrants