

Petition to Algerian Govt: Stop renewed attacks on women

Violence against women in the southern city of M'sila, Algeria

Friday 8 July 2011, by [Petition / Sign-on Letter](#) (Date first published: 7 July 2011).

Two more 'punitive' actions against women have taken place in less than one month in the southern city of M'sila, Algeria (night of June 11 and July 2-3, 2011). Their houses were burnt down by hundreds of youth, and they barely escaped being lynched. The police did not intervene.

This is not the first time similar events take place (see background information below). Since the 80s, there were not just attacks on individual women but real pogroms against working women, living with or without their children, but definitely without the male guardians (wali) that the Family Code still prescribes for women. As Algeria suffers from growing unemployment, women are accused of 'stealing men's or youth's jobs' when, widowed or repudiated, they have to earn their living and that of their children, sometimes by migrating where jobs are within Algeria, away from their family location, hence without their walis. Invariably, these women are accused by the perpetrators of being prostitutes, as if it were a licence to kill ! - an accusation relayed by many in the Algerian media. And invariably, the police watches without intervening to protect the women, nor arresting the perpetrators. Similarly, judges have taken very lenient measures against the few men that we actually brought to court.

This does not happen in a political vacuum, but in a context where the state has been negotiating the sharing of power with fundamentalist parties. In many instances, one can track the ignition of the pogroms to incendiary preaches by fundamentalist imams, urging their followers to 'chase the devil out of the city'. Fundamentalists have also demonstrated inside and outside courts in defense of the accused and justified their actions.

What we see here at work is the conjunction of several factors: the consequences of the legal provision forcing women to be under the 'protection' of a wali; the economic circumstances that force women to internal migration within Algeria and the denial of their right to work; the unchallenged ideological power of fundamentalist religious leaders and parties, their instrumentalisation of poverty and unemployment, their promotion of moral order; and the political stand of the present government that would rather share the power with fundamentalists than emancipate the nation.

Women in Algeria are neither protected nor defended. We call on international women activists to take urgent action, not only by signing the below appeal on line, but also by leading delegations to protest at Algerian Embassies, republishing information in their national newspapers (available in the Algerian press, and on web sites such as [siawi.org](#), [hassi-messaoud.over-blog.com/](#), or [wluml.org](#)), and sending observers if and when such cases are brought to justice.

Marieme Helie Lucas
Secularism Is A Women's Issue ([siawi.org](#))
July 7, 2011

PETITION:

The Algerian authorities and justice system persistently failed in ensuring protection of and redress for the working women that were attacked, robbed, burnt, mutilated, buried alive, wounded, raped and gang raped, killed in Hassi Messaoud in 2001 and 2010 and for those attacked in M'sila in June and July 2011.

We demand an enquiry and the arrest of perpetrators. We will not tolerate that the accusation of prostitution be used as a licence to kill.

To be sent to:

President de la Republique: El Mouradia BP Alger Gare . fax: 00213 21691595

Monsieur Tayeb Belaiz, ministre de la justice, garde des Sceaux
8, place Bir Hakem Alger; fax: 00213 21922956 ou 00213 21921701

Monsieur Dahou Ould Kablia,
ministre de l'Intérieur et des Collectivités locales
Pamais du Gouvernement, Rue Docteur Saadane, Alger
Fax:00213 21737681

Me Nouara Saadia Djaffar,
ministre déléguée auprès du ministre de la Solidarité nationale et de la famille, chargée de la famille et de la Condition féminine
125 boulevard Abderrahmane Laala El Madania 16075 Alger
fax: 0021321667574

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

See also the French version of this section on ESSF.

* June 22, 1989, after three women received threats to force them to move out of their houses, men decided to 'purify the area' and burn to ashes the house of Oum Ali, mother of 5, a divorcee living on her own with her children. Her youngest handicapped son aged 3 dies in the fire. The Algerian feminist Zazi Sadou brought her testimony to the Women's Tribunal at the Beijing World Conference on Women. It was published by WLUML.

* On April 11, 2001, hundreds of men attacked working women in the southern oil city of Hassi Messaoud; these women were mostly cleaning personnel or cook helpers for oil companies. They are economic migrants from northern Algeria, whose salaries sustain up to 20 family members, in the region of Oran. See 'Ordinary fascism' by Marieme Helie Lucas on siawi.org (<http://www.siawi.org/article2454.html>).

The pogrom started on Friday after the prayer, following an incendiary speech by the local imam. It

lasted for three days in Hassi Messaoud, with police watching. It then extended to other southern cities. Women victims lost their jobs for not being present at work, while they were detained by the police, supposedly for protection - after the events. No union defended them.

In the first hearing, women plaintiffs were threatened inside the court room. In the appeal case that took place in Biskra in 2005, only three perpetrators out of one hundred that were clearly identified by women victims mostly as their neighbors, were sentenced to a maximum of three years in jail. A whole book, in French, was published in 2010, describing the long struggle for justice and against impunity, waged by the only two plaintiffs that stood up to the numerous threats they received to make them renounce to bring the case to court.

See Nadia Kaci, *Laissées pour mortes*, MaxMilo ed.

* On April 11, 2010, similar attacks took place in Hassi Messaoud and have gone on and off since then, in total impunity. (See dedicated web site: Women of Hassi Messaoud. See also: Statement on massacres in Hassi Messaoud, by European Feminist Initiative (15 April 2010))

Women's organisations are prevented to enter the area. Women victims are very afraid to speak up and lose their jobs.

* On June 11, 2011, youth attack the area '500 logements' in M'sila. They burnt the houses of women living alone.

* On July 2-3, 2011, more than 400 youth attacked the area of Chebilia in M'sila, they burnt the apartments of women they accused of prostitution.

To sign this petition go to:

<http://www.siawi.org/article2455.html#sp2455>
