

Algerian Women Speak Out On Violence

Saturday 30 December 2006, by [ZENATI Hassen](#) (Date first published: 10 December 2006).

ALGIERS: The young woman's smile is sad, her greeting weary. Assaulted by her half brother, Farida took refuge in one of 30 safe houses throughout the Algerian capital that shelter abused women.

"After she was assaulted, Farida practically lost her mind," recalled Myriam Belala, president of a help group called SOS Women in Trouble. "We saved her from a mental asylum." Although a recent government study said women were making inroads professionally in this mainly Muslim north African country of 33 million, Algeria has come under fire from rights groups who say poor treatment of women persists.

Last year, Amnesty International presented a report to the United Nations highlighting "the Algerian government's failure to protect women against rape, beatings, and widespread legal and economic discrimination".

Some 7,400 women filed domestic violence complaints last year, 1,555 more than in 2004, according to the law enforcement agency that handles such cases.

"Violence against women is a pervasive problem in Algeria. It touches all social classes and all regions, except in the extreme south where the Tuaregs banish men who rape women," said Belala, referring to the Berber-speaking nomads who live in the Sahara region.

Violence overshadowed Algeria for nearly a half-century. A million lives were lost in the battle for independence from France in 1962, and another 150,000 to 200,000 people were slaughtered in a brutal civil war that followed the annulment of 1992 elections, though trouble has subsided since 2003.

But Belala said SOS Woman "broke a taboo" when it was founded some 15 years ago by becoming the first group to publicly denounce a different sort of violence — the domestic sort against women.

The group's crisis workers say domestic abuse cases are on the rise, but many victims fear scandal so never go to the police.

"However, they talk to us anonymously on the phone. We get hundreds of calls from women who complain of being sodomized or forced to do things they are not morally comfortable with," she said.-AFP

P.S.

* From Dawn (Pakistan):

<http://www.dawn.com/2006/12/10/int14.htm>