

WLRN transcript, WORLD NEWS for Edition 57: Radical Feminism 2020

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Emiliann LORENZEN: Saudi Arabia's women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul has been sentenced to 5 years and 8 months in prison by the kingdom's special court for terrorism offenses. The sentence includes the time she has already served and a 2 year and 10 month suspension, meaning she could be released in about two months. Her sister Lina said that Loujain was tried and convicted in a rushed trial that "failed to provide evidence beyond Loujain's well noted activism and failed to properly investigate the torture [she] endured in prison."

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In Iran, a bill called Protection, Dignity, and Security of Women Against Violence has been approved by the Cabinet and will be submitted to Parliament for a vote before it becomes law. This bill has been under review since September 2019. The bill criminalizes actions and behaviors that cause "physical or mental harm" to women. It also upholds rights and freedoms guaranteed to women by obliging government agencies to criminalize their denial. Women will also be protected from blackmail and "considers legal punishment to those men who abandon their spouses without any rationale." Law enforcement agencies will also be required to create special police units with trained female police personnel to identify cases of violence against women. The bill also recommends establishing a fund which provides medical expenses for victims of violence and training services. This step forward is seen as a victory for women's rights advocates in Iran who have been campaigning for this legislation for more than a decade.

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An all-male parliamentary Women's Committee of Kuwait has been met with outrage online. Kuwait's parliament is elected by the people and is made up of 50 members who serve a 4 year term. 29 female candidates ran for the general elections on December 5th and none were elected, leaving the country with an all-male parliament. Women in Kuwait fought for suffrage for decades and finally gained it in 2005. Kuwait

ranks 122 of 153 in gender equality globally, but in comparison to Middle Eastern and North African countries, Kuwait ranks 3rd for gender equality after Israel and the United Arab Emirates.

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In Ireland, the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offenses bill was signed into law. The law will make it a crime to take, distribute, publish, or threaten to distribute intimate images without the subjects' consent and with the intent to cause harm, which will be punishable by up to 7 years in prison and with an unlimited fine. If there is no intent to cause harm, then the maximum sentence will be 12 months in prison and a 5000 euro fine. The law will be known as "Coco's Law" after Nicole Fox who committed suicide after years of online harassment at the age of 21.

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Australia's world-first cyber watchdog, the eSafety Commissioner, is set to pass laws that safeguard people experiencing online abuse, and the laws would require social media platforms to take down offensive material within 24 hours and to provide the identity of those who posted the content. Adults who post harmful material like revenge porn or death threats can be fined up to \$111,000. If the laws pass, then Australia would be the first country to require websites, apps, and social media platforms to take down abusive material. Online services would be required to report to the eSafety Commissioner on how they are fighting online material such as child abuse, terrorism, and "digital lynch-mobs," and they will be fined if they fail to report. The law would also protect children who are victims of cyber-bullying.

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The Scottish parliament voted to replace gender with sex in a rape support law. The 2014 Victims and Witnesses Act allows victims of sexual assault to request an examiner of a particular gender, but Labour MSP Joanna Lamont moved an amendment to the Forensic Medical Services Bill to change that to sex because gender is too ambiguous. Members of the Scottish Parliament voted unanimously in favor of the Forensic Medical Services bill. The bill also allows victims of sexual assault who are 16 or over to seek medical treatment without having to first report the attack to the police.

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In Denmark, sexual intercourse without consent will now be considered rape, regardless of the presence of any physical violence. Despite Denmark's reputation for being one of the best countries for gender equality in the European Union, there is a "pervasive rape culture," according to Amnesty International. In Europe, 1 in 3 women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence, and these figures have increased since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. This law reform makes Denmark one of 12 countries in Europe, including Germany, the UK, and Sweden, to recognize sex without consent as rape.

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Argentina's senate passed a law legalizing elective abortion. Abortion will be legalized up to the 14th week of pregnancy, and it will be legal after that time in cases of rape or danger to the mother's life. Argentina is the largest Latin American country to legalize abortion. Argentina's feminist movement has been fighting for legal abortion for more than 30 years, and activists hope that this bill's approval will influence other Latin American countries, who are dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, to follow suit. Despite the progress this law makes for women's rights, the term 'woman' has disappeared in the language used in the law and replaced with 'person.' Maria Jose Bineta, feminist activist from Argentina, writes: "What neither the local nor international press said about this law is that it removes the word 'woman' from the Argentinian penal code and replaces it with the neutral/functionalist 'pregnant person.'"

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On January 1st, California allowed incarcerated transgender people to ask for a transfer to a state prison or detention center that matches their gender identity. The law also requires state prison personnel to record the person's self-reported gender identity and gender pronouns during the intake process. Prison staff, contractors, and volunteers are required to address the individuals by their chosen names and pronouns. This bill was authored by Senator Scott Wiener and signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom. The Twitter account Women's Voices criticized Senator Wiener's bill, stating, "Women in California prisons will be forcibly incarcerated with male offenders, putting them at risk, due to the political endeavors of two men: [Gavin Newsom] and [Scott Wiener]. No one asked the women what they thought of this." Senator Wiener responded to the account directly, saying, "1) Trans women are women & we followed their lead in crafting this legislation. 2) We met with incarcerated cis women & incorporated their feedback. 3) Trans women are brutalized in men's

prisons. You're ignoring their safety & pretending they're not women, which is transphobic." He faced criticism online for this Tweet.

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Hawaiian Representative Tulsi Gabbard and Representative Markwayne Mullin introduced the Protect Women's Sports Act of 2020 bill, which seeks to strengthen the sex-based protections of Title IX. Rep. Gabbard said, "Title IX is being weakened by some states who are misinterpreting Title IX, creating uncertainty, undue hardship and lost opportunities for female athletes. Our legislation protects Title IX's original intent which was based on the general biological distinction between men and women athletes based on sex." If the bill passes, then institutions that receive federal funding will not be allowed to "permit a person whose biological sex at birth is male to participate in an athletic program or activity that is designated for women and girls." Rep. Gabbard left the House of Representatives this month after deciding not to run for reelection. Rep. Mullin won a fourth term in the House in November.

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Congress passed the Stop Female Genital Mutilation Act and it now waits to be signed into law by the president. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that more than 510, 000 women and girls in the United States have had FGM or are at risk of it. This bill had bipartisan support and according to the senior adviser to the advocacy group Independent Women's Voice Andrea Bottner, "The success of the Stop Female Genital Mutilation Act is one case where politics was set aside for the protection of women and girls. Its bipartisan spirit brings hope that it will be the gift that keeps on giving."

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J.K. Rowling was mentioned as one of the winners of the 2020 Russell Prize for her essay on sex and gender. She was awarded for her well-written prose, her bravery, and her honesty. The judge Amol Rajan stated, "We should all applaud bravery in writers - even those with whom we disagree. And Rowling's essay contained moments of both real beauty and piercing honesty, as when she revealed that she is a survivor of domestic abuse and sexual assault." He also criticized the abuse she faced after publishing the essay. Suzanne Moore's essay on why she left the Guardian was also mentioned as an act of bravery.

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On January 5th, Channel 3000, a local news media outlet in Madison, Wisconsin, reported on "transphobic" stickers in the Tenney Park neighborhood. The stickers were primarily black and white with the dictionary definition of the word woman printed on them. News Channel 3000 called them examples of "hate speech," and reported that the City Parks Department and alder Patrick Heck are condemning the stickers as acts of vandalism. Meanwhile, "Transgender Defender" stickers depicting a male middle finger in pink and baby blue stripes, were not mentioned in Channel 3000's report. There are dozens of the pink and baby blue male middle finger stickers posted in the same locations as the Adult Human Female stickers around the neighborhood. To see pictures of the variety of trans rights activist and feminist stickers popping up in this sticker war, check out WLRN's Facebook, Twitter and Spinster pages.

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That concludes WLRN's world news segment for Thursday, January 7th, 2021. Share your news stories and tips with us by emailing wlrnewscontact@gmail.com and letting us know what's going on!