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Lebanon: Domestic Violence Law Good, but Incomplete

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The domestic violence law Lebanon's parliament passed on April 1, 2014, should advance women's rights and safety, but falls short in key areas, Human Rights Watch said today. The new law establishes important protection measures and related policing and court reforms, but leaves women at risk of marital rape and other abuse.

Women face high rates of domestic violence in Lebanon, but until the passage of the Law on Protection of Women and Family Members from Domestic Violence, there had been no specific law on domestic violence. A domestic violence hotline run by a local nongovernmental organization, KAFA (Enough), receives more than 2,600 reports of domestic abuse per year. The organization said it had reports of 25 killings of women by a family member in Lebanon between 2010 and 2013.

"Lebanon's law on domestic violence finally recognizes that women subjected to abuse by husbands and families need protection and legal recourse," said Rothna Begum, Middle East and North Africa women's rights researcher at Human Rights Watch. "But the law has serious flaws and the parliament should consider amendments to fully protect women from domestic violence."

Lebanese women's rights organizations and service providers, especially KAFA, have led a multi-year campaign for a domestic violence law. The groups have protested the law's shortcomings, and said they would press for parliament to pass amendments to expand protection.

The law, an amended version of a draft written by KAFA that has been pending in parliament since 2010, includes positive elements such as a provision to enable a woman to get a restraining order against an abuser. It calls for establishing temporary shelters for the survivors of abuse; assigning a public prosecutor in each governorate to receive complaints and investigate domestic violence; and establishing specialized family violence units within Lebanon's domestic police, the Internal Security Forces, to process complaints. President Michel Suleiman is expected to sign the bill into law in several weeks. On April 2, 2014, the president said he would study the law with parliament to introduce some amendments, media reported.