

When child sex isn't rape: French to set age of consent

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Is a 13-year-old girl old enough to agree to sex with an adult? That's a question France is asking itself as the government prepares to set a legal age for sexual consent for the first time.

Twice in recent weeks, French courts have refused to prosecute men for rape after they had sex with 11-year-olds because authorities couldn't prove coercion. Amid the public horror at that situation, the French government is drafting a bill to say that sex with children under a certain age is by definition coercive.

Justice Minister Nicole Belloubet provoked consternation and dismay among feminist groups by saying a legal minimum age of 13 for sexual consent "is worth considering."

Activists staged a small protest Tuesday in central Paris to argue that the age of consent should be set at 15. Protesters waved placards that read "for him impunity, for her a life sentence" in reference to the recent two cases that rocked the country.

"We want the law to guarantee that before 15 there can be no concept of consent," said prominent French feminist activist Caroline de Haas.

"I don't know why (Belloubet) said it," added Alice Collet, member of the National Collective for Women's Rights. "It's a sign of ignorance of the issues."

A legal age of consent is just one piece of an upcoming French bill on sexual violence and harassment that's gained importance amid worldwide concerns unleashed by the rape and sexual assault allegations against Hollywood film producer Harvey Weinstein.

"In America with the Weinstein fallout, there have been legal investigations. But here it has been radio silence from politicians," said de Haas.

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