

Kuwait urged to free Cross-dressers from Jail

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Human Rights Watch urged the Kuwaiti authorities on Friday to release from prison 14 men jailed in recent months for having dressed as women in public.

Kuwait "should immediately release more than a dozen persons jailed under Kuwait's new dress-code law" since mid-December, the New York-based rights HRW said in a statement received by AFP.

"Kuwaiti authorities should immediately drop all charges against those arrested, and investigate charges of ill-treatment in detention," it said.

According to HRW the Kuwaiti National Assembly approved in December a law which criminalises people who "imitate the appearance of the opposite sex." Since then 14 people have been arrested.

The new law targets namely "transgender people... (and) aims at further restricting their rights and completely eliminating their public presence," it added.

Joe Stork, deputy director of HRW's Middle East division, dismissed the law as "repressive" saying it is meant "to eradicate the freedoms and visibility of people who already face discrimination daily."

HRW quoted friends of the prisoners as saying they were being subjected to "physical and psychological abuse", including beatings, and that none had access to legal representation.

"The beatings and ill-treatment to which authorities reportedly subjected the prisoners violate internationally recognised prohibitions against torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment," it said.

HRW, quoting the Kuwaiti daily Al-Rai, said prison authorities ordered guards to "shave the heads of detainees as a form or punishment."

"The paper quoted a prison administrator as saying 'this step (shaving heads) follows the passage of the law concerning men who imitate the appearance of women,'" HRW said.

In August, three men were jailed for a year in the United Arab Emirates for dressing as women.