

Society

Egypt introduces measures against human trafficking

Hassan Abdel Zaher

Cairo

Egypt announced plans to introduce a law against human trafficking that would carry heavy penalties, including prison time and hefty fines, on convicted traffickers. The measure would also establish a new court to look into human trafficking.

"Traffickers work very freely here simply because they know that they will not be arrested and if they are arrested, they will not be punished any time soon," said Ahmed Muselhi, a member of the Egyptian Bar Association's Human Trafficking Department. "The lack of punishment just encourages traffickers to work even more."

Anti-trafficking activists say fighting trafficking in persons in Egypt will take more than the introduction of a new law.

Egypt has long been the destination of large numbers of migrants escaping conflicts, famine and tough economic conditions in Africa. The *Trafficking in Persons Report*, issued by the US State Department, described Egypt as a "source, transit and destination country for men, women and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking".

"Egyptian children, including

those among the estimated 200,000 to 1 million street children, are vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labour in domestic service, begging and agricultural work," according to the 2015 report.

It said "individuals from the Gulf" purchase Egyptian women and girls for "temporary" or "summer" marriages for the purpose of prostitution or forced labour. "These arrangements are often facilitated by victims' parents and marriage brokers, who profit from the transaction," it said.

Child sex tourism, the report said, occurs primarily in Cairo, the coastal city of Alexandria and the southern city of Luxor.

Syrian refugees in Egypt are "increasingly vulnerable to trafficking", according to the report, which adds that men and women from south and south-eastern Asia and east Africa "are subjected to forced labour in domestic service, construction, cleaning and begging".

The Sinai peninsula has always been a hotbed of trafficking, where numerous groups of traffickers help the refugees cross into Israel. Some refugees were forced into sex or labour and others were subject to extortion, the report said.

In recent years, lawlessness in neighbouring Libya and the civil war in Syria have posed new challenges for Egyptians working against human trafficking.

Some Sinai traffickers were reported to have moved to Egypt's western desert to facilitate the movement of African migrants or Syrian refugees into Libya and then to Europe, causing alarm in Europe, especially Italy, which has been receiving growing numbers of mi-



Egyptian medical staff providing care to Syrian refugees. In the background, Coast Guards processing other refugees after arrest.

grants in recent years.

Egypt's new law on human trafficking would stipulate penalties for traffickers, according to Alaa Awad, the head of the Ministry of Immigration's Human Trafficking Department. He said the law would soon be finalised by his ministry and then be subject to nationwide discussions before being voted on.

According to media reports, the law introduces a specific definition of terms such as "human trafficking", "traffickers" and "trafficking victims".

The law stipulates prison sentences for traffickers and fines of 50,000-200,000 Egyptian pounds (\$6,250-\$25,000) for traffickers.

If trafficking is committed by a group of people, carried out with the aim of staging terrorist attacks or results in the death of trafficked persons, traffickers could be sentenced to prison and fined 200,000-500,000 Egyptian pounds

(\$25,000-\$62,500).

Another codicil would make it necessary for the Egyptian government to protect trafficking victims. There is also a section that obliges the government to coordinate deportation of victims with the foreign ministries of their home countries.

Egypt has long been the destination of large numbers of migrants escaping conflicts.

Anti-trafficking activists say, however, fighting trafficking in persons in Egypt will take more than the introduction of a new law and the creation of a human trafficking court.

"Enforcing the laws is even more important, in fact," said Saeed Abdel Hafez, the head of local non-

governmental organisation National Dialogue Forum for Development and Human Rights. "And to enforce the law, Egypt needs to have the political will to act against this dangerous phenomenon."

Abdel Hafez and like-minded observers say Egypt previously lacked the will to act against human trafficking.

He said the state-run National Council for Human Rights once had its own anti-human trafficking department. The department advised the government on strategies to fight trafficking and prevent Egyptian youths from falling victim to local or international traffickers.

"The department was closed down years ago and the council has not tried to revive it again," Abdel Hafez said. "If the government is really serious about fighting trafficking now, it should investigate why it stopped fighting it in the past."

El Asira's sharia-compliant sensuality

Rob L. Wagner

Jeddah

Never did entrepreneur Abdelaziz Aouragh think he would be identified as a purveyor of *halal* sex products. But Western news reports, based more on froth than fact and a profound misunderstanding of marketing female luxury products, pushed Aouragh to educate his customers on the distinction between sex and sensuality.

Aouragh is the founder of Amsterdam-based El Asira, which is Arabic for "The Society" or "The Tribe". His company sells luxury body care products to enhance the sensuality of the love lives of Muslims and non-Muslims. El Asira's marketing plan provides "a unique blend of Agarwood and Argan cosmetics for body and soul" for women to "feel admired. Feel loved. Feel sensual."

Think of the intimacy of Victoria's Secret rolled into pharmaceutical-quality body oils and creams.

So, no, the image of seedy adult store does not apply. Think of the intimacy of Victoria's Secret rolled into pharmaceutical-quality body oils and creams.

"We have leisure and body care products and some items are for intimacy like cooling and warming creams," Aouragh said. "Our branding fits perfectly for Muslims living

a certain lifestyle."

Aouragh said he was in negotiations with a group of potential investors to open a concept store in Saudi Arabia. He consulted with Saudi religious authorities to ensure his products are sharia-compliant. The ingredients are *halal* and his products' uses are permitted under Islamic law. He already has a distributor for his products to retail shops in the United Arab Emirates, Maldives and Malaysia.

"We are interested and we have the ambition to open a concept store in Mecca or another Saudi city," Aouragh said.

By opening such a store, El Asira makes its appeal to a specific lifestyle. Aouragh can draw on his experience of producing female luxury products and put that experience to practical use to test the reactions of his customers on a micro scale, he said.

Aouragh sees the typical El Asira consumer as reflective of all demographics. "Muslims and non-Muslims appreciate our philosophy and our experience," he said. "They are enthusiastic and a logical follow-up would be that they will talk about us in a positive way. It's hard to pinpoint a specific demographic."

Aouragh may be reluctant to say so, but his customer base is pretty clear. An estimated 52% of the 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide are under the age of 25, making young women potentially the largest consumer of El Asira's *halal* cosmetics and body care products. According to Trade Arabia, a business newsletter covering the Middle East, Muslim consumer spending is expected to hit \$2.6 trillion by 2020, a significant increase from \$1.8 trillion in 2014.

To develop a strong customer base Aouragh is focusing on Islamic



Saudi women shop at a lingerie store in the Saudi Red Sea port of Jeddah.

branding that targets the untapped Muslim buyer by offering products that adhere to sharia principles. *Halal* products are free of pork by-products and alcohol in make-up, shampoos, lotions, oils and creams.

The Halal Industry Development Corporation reported that *halal*-certified beauty product sales have reached \$5 billion annually. Multinational companies such as Avon and Colgate-Palmolive are making forays into Muslim countries. In Saudi Arabia, the body care market is expected to reach \$7.5 billion in 2018, according to analyst Euro-monitor International.

For many companies, Islamic branding may be the next best thing to attract new consumers but it's actually been practiced since at least the 1980s. The chocolate company Nestlé was an early pioneer in using sharia-compliant prod-

ucts with about 20% of its facilities producing *halal* Kit Kat chocolate bars and Nescafé. Wal-Mart in the United States has been selling *halal* products since 2008.

Although El Asira's ambitions are big, it remains a small company only 6 years old. "In 2011-12 we were offered a store but we were too fresh, too young and too small to open a retail store," Aouragh said. El Asira, which has no employees other than Aouragh, remains a minor player among the multinational companies that have more resources. To open a retail shop, companies must provide a line of products up to 200 items. El Asira has about 20 products.

Aouragh has solved that problem by working with Beate Uhse AG, a German company that specialises in erotica with a focus on women's fashion and style. Aouragh said

that he has the logistical support of Beate Uhse's 700-member staff.

El Asira's newcomer status has not intimidated Aouragh. He sees Durex, the United Kingdom-based company with an extensive range of body products, as his direct competitor. Admittedly, Aouragh says he has his work cut out for him. But he is slowly expanding his line to include lingerie and perhaps condoms, which is Durex's signature product.

Aouragh's goal is to carve a niche in Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries with his emphasis on Islamic branding.

Ehsan Ahrari, a foreign affairs consultant on the Middle East for the Virginia-based Strategic Paradigms, said Saudi Arabia's relatively new membership in the World Trade Organisation would make it easier for multinational companies to do business in the kingdom.

"There are enormous benefits for Saudi Arabia's economy stemming from its newly acquired membership in WTO," Ahrari said. "However, the chief problems will revolve around its ability and willingness to open its economy, invite global capital... and most importantly minimise the conflicts between Islamic laws and laws of global economic community."

With the religious community's blessing, Aouragh doesn't see that as a problem. He is charting an open path to Saudi Arabia. The country, he said, has a special place in his heart. An outlet in the kingdom would serve Saudi consumers well, he said.

"Saudi Arabia for me is a beautiful country - *Ardh al Tawheed* (Land of the unity of the Shahada)," he said. "I respect Saudi Arabia very much and my products are inspired by Saudi Arabia."