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French Women Fight Back

[NY Times](#)

French women are fed up with sexual harassment, and they aren't going to take it anymore. That was the message in an extraordinary "Statement Against Sexism" published in France on Sunday and signed by 17 prominent women, including the International Monetary Fund chief, Christine Lagarde.

All 17 are current or former French government ministers. Hailing from across the political spectrum, they wrote: "We got involved in politics for different reasons. We pursue different goals. But we share the will to make sexism have no place in our society."

The women were moved to speak out following accounts in France Inter and the news site Mediapart on May 9 by eight women, including four high-ranking members of France's Green Party, of repeated instances of sexual aggression and harassment by Denis Baupin, a former Green Party politician. Though Mr. Baupin denies the accusations, he resigned his post as vice president of France's National Assembly after the allegations were made public.

The uproar over Mr. Baupin prompted Finance Minister Michel Sapin to issue a public apology on May 10 for what he called "inappropriate" conduct on his own part toward a journalist at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in January 2015. A year ago, 40 French female journalists published a letter of protest against pervasive sexism by French male politicians, including salacious text messages, lewd comments and offers of political scoops in exchange for sexual favors.

The women who signed the "Statement Against Sexism" noted that sexual harassment is a problem beyond the political realm: "This happens every day to women using public transportation, on the street, in businesses, in universities." This despite the fact that in 2012 France passed a tough sexual harassment law with jail terms of up to two years and fines of up to 30,000 euros (\$33,600).

One problem is that there have been few convictions, and thus few criminal penalties that could deter sexual harassers. The current limitation of three years to file criminal charges for alleged sexual harassment could be extended. And police stations need to have dedicated officers to deal with sexual harassment complaints: French women say that many officers do not take sexual harassment seriously when it is reported.

Meanwhile, the women who signed the statement are encouraging others to speak out against harassment. "Enough," they wrote. "We will no longer be silent."