

Women caned in Malaysia for attempting to have lesbian sex

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Rare punishment was carried out in a courtroom and witnessed by up to 100 people

Two women found guilty of attempting to have sex have been caned in Malaysia's conservative north-eastern state of Terengganu, in the first punishment of its kind.

The two women, aged 22 and 32, were caned six times each in the Terengganu sharia high court just after 10am, after the sentence was read out.

The caning was carried out in the courtroom and was witnessed by up to 100 people, including the public.

While women in [Malaysia](#) have been caned for sexual offences in the past, such as adultery, rights activists say this is the first time two women have been caned for attempting to have sex. The punishment was shocking and it was a spectacle," Thilaga Sulathireh, an activist from the Malaysian rights group Justice for Sisters who was in court on Monday told the Guardian, "For all intents and purposes it was a public caning."

"This case shows a regression for human rights," she said, "Not only for LGBT people but all persons because corporal punishment affects all people."

The Justice for Sisters activist said the group was concerned the case would set a dangerous precedent for the increased policing of morality and sexual identities in Malaysia.

Sharia law enforcement officers in Terengganu identified the two women attempting to engage in sexual acts in a car in April.

The two women were fined by the sharia high court on 12 August, after they pleaded guilty to committing musahaqah, or sexual relations between women.

The judges ordered they be caned six times and fined 3,300 Malaysian Ringgit (£619).

Under Malaysian law, each state is empowered to enact laws based on sharia guidelines.

Rights groups had previously urged the Malaysian government to drop the case, which they argued constituted torture under international human rights law.

The verdict, said Graeme Reid, director of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender program at Human Rights Watch, was the "latest blow to Malaysia's LGBT community, which had hoped for better protection under the new government".

"This prosecution and punishment," he said in an August 21 statement, "will only fuel the recent wave of homophobia and transphobia in Malaysia."

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The Guardian

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