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Video: Amina Tyler, topless Tunisian activist escapes her family



Tunis, The Associated Press

The woman who scandalized Tunisia by posting topless photos of herself as a form of feminist protest is now trying to leave the country, her former lawyer said Tuesday after a video surfaced in which the woman recounted being drugged and given virginity tests by relatives. Amina Tyler, 19, shocked this Muslim nation when she posted Facebook photos with the words “my body belongs to me” scrawled across her naked chest. She was later spirited away by her family after religious hardliners issued death threats against her. Bouchra Belhaj Hamida, Tyler’s former lawyer who has in the past acted as her spokeswoman, said Tyler had escaped from her family in a village outside the capital and was now staying with friends as she gathered the necessary documents to get to France. In a video interview posted Monday on the Facebook site of the Ukrainian women’s group FEMEN, the young woman described her ordeal and vowed one last demonstration before leaving.

“I don’t want to leave Tunisia before I do a topless protest. I will do a topless protest and then I will leave Tunisia,” Tyler said in a filmed Skype conversation with a member of FEMEN, a group that often uses nude protests to display support for women’s rights. Fingering a pendant representing Tunisia’s Berber ethnic minority, Tyler described how she was snatched by her cousin from a cafe, beaten and had her cell phone SIM card destroyed. She was then taken to her aunt’s and then her grandmother’s house, where relatives admonished her and made her read from the Muslim holy book, the Quran. “Two old women of my family checked to see if I was virgin or not. That was horrible and against my freedom,” she said in the video. “They took me to the kitchen and said take off my clothes and we will see if you are virgin.” She added that she was given large doses of medicine that made her sleep a great deal and that her family was now searching for her. Hamida, a prominent feminist lawyer, would not reveal Tyler’s location except to say she was not far from the capital. Tyler is gathering the material she needs to reach France, including an ID card, a passport and a visa, Hamida said. Unlike in some Muslim nations, in Tunisia women do not need the permission of a father or husband to leave the country