

# *Germany Arrests First Cologne Sex Assaults Suspect*

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Berlin, January 19 (RHC)-- German police have arrested a male refugee over alleged sex assaults against women in the Western city of Cologne on New Year's Eve. Prosecutors said on Monday that police arrested the first suspect directly linked to the string of assaults that have shocked Germany.

The unidentified refugee is a 26-year-old man from Algeria and was arrested at a refugee shelter in the nearby town of Kerpen over the weekend for allegedly abusing a woman and stealing her mobile phone.

Prosecutor's office spokesman Ulrich Bremer said some 497 women have filed police reports in connection to the New Year's attacks, including three rape cases. Some 21 people have also been charged with non-sexual offenses.

The attack is mainly blamed on North African and Arab refugees in the country and has fueled debate among Germany's far-right politicians who are against Chancellor Angela Merkel's open door policy that has resulted in accepting around one million refugees in 2015 from war-torn countries.

On January 10, gangs of people in Cologne attacked Pakistani refugees and a Syrian man, in what appeared to be reprisal assaults on asylum seekers. People have held a number of demonstrations in different German cities in protest against the sex assaults and called on the government to limit the number of refugee arrivals.

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