



# MENA WOMEN NEWS BRIEF



MAY 24<sup>TH</sup> – JUNE 5<sup>TH</sup>, 2018

## AFGHANISTAN

### **May 29: Afghan women denied justice over violence, United Nations says**

“A law meant to protect Afghan women from violence is being undermined by authorities who routinely refer even serious criminal cases to traditional mediation councils that fail to protect victims, the United Nations said on Tuesday. The Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) law, passed in 2009, was a centerpiece of efforts to improve protection for Afghan women, who suffer widespread violence in one of the worst countries in the world to be born female.” [\(Reuters\)](#)

## EGYPT

### **May 31: Female Genital Mutilation is Declared Religiously Forbidden in Islam**

“Egyptian Dar Al-Iftaa declared that female genital mutilation (FGM) is religiously forbidden on May 30, 2018, adding that banning FGM should be a religious duty due to its harmful effects on the body. Dar Al-Iftaa also explained that FGM is not mentioned in Islamic laws and that it only still occurs because it’s considered to be a social norm in the rural areas and some poor parts of Egypt. FGM is considered as an attack on religion through damaging the most sensitive organ in the female body. In Islam, protecting the body from any harm is a must and mutilation violates this rule.” [\(Egypt Today\)](#)

### **June 4: Government proposes new draft law to ban early marriage**

“Egypt’s government has proposed a new draft law that includes amendments to the child law article 12 of 1996, which states cases in which parents could be deprived from the authority of guardianship over the girl or her property...Hawary told Egypt Today that this bill stipulates that a father who forces his daughter to get married before reaching the age of marriage will be deprived from the authority of guardianship over the girl or her property.” [\(Egypt Today\)](#)

## IRAN

### **June 4: Youth, women, and minorities have valid concerns**

“Iranian President Hassan Rouhani admitted on Friday that the youth, women and minorities have legitimate grievances, *Anadolu Agency* reported, citing the Iranian presidency’s official website. ‘Many of the complaints and concerns of the young, women and ethnic and religious groups are right and the government is fully determined to address them,’ the Iranian president told a group of ‘Sunni clerics and intellectuals,’ according to the presidential website. ‘Any Muslim and Iranian must enjoy all their rights... Even in relation to non-Muslims who believe in the oneness of God, He orders understanding, unity and living together,’ he added.” [\(Middle East Monitor\)](#)

## IRAQ

### **May 29: Love and Politics in Baghdad: The Iraqi female writers breaking taboos**

“In a country where being female and having your work published rarely goes hand in hand, a fresh generation of women has chosen to overlook limiting social norms and instead follow in the footsteps of a long line of influential Iraqi female writers. For them, the written word serves to denounce social injustices in a society they regard as antiquated and conservative. Today, Ridha Alwan visitors share books, organize debates and collective readings and discuss their dreams and passions as well as how to survive war, misogyny and grief.” [\(The National\)](#)



**June 1: Yazidi activist: Islamic state detains Iraqi women, children in underground prisons in Syria**

“An Iraqi activist has revealed places where Islamic State keep Yazidi women and children at underground prisons in Syria. Speaking to the Russian Sputnik news agency, Hussein Ali al-Khansouri said Islamic State holds no less than 2000 province as well as Desheisha region, near borders between Syria and Iraq. Among the abductees are Yazidi women and children. ‘At Desheisha only, there are more than 300 Yazidi children and adults, who were kidnapped by IS in August 2014,’ he said. All the above-mentioned regions, according to Khansouri, ‘are being shelled by the U.S.-led Coalition as well as French jets, especially near Desheish and Hegeen’.” [\(Iraqi News\)](#)

**June 3: Iraqi court sentences French woman to life for joining ISIS**

“Boughedir, 27, was captured with her children by Iraqi forces in Mosul in July 2017, at the end of a protracted battle to retake the city from the IS group. She was initially condemned to seven months in prison by a court in Baghdad in February for entering the country illegally and was to be deported to France at the end of her sentence. But upon examining her case, an appeals court ordered that she be retried, arguing that Boughedir was aware of her husband’s plans to join the IS group and had “knowingly” followed him to Iraq, therefore violating the country’s anti-terrorism law, under which acts of terrorism are punishable by death.” [\(France 24\)](#)

**June 5: World Failing Yazidi women forced into sex slavery – charity head**

“The world is failing Yazidi women forced into sex slavery by Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria, with 3,000 still unaccounted for, according to the head of a charity dedicated to helping survivors recover from their horrific experiences. Murad Ismael said many Yazidi women and girls had been brainwashed or killed in captivity, while those who had managed to escape after years of enslavement and rape were left struggling to survive without an income or identity papers. ‘Every inch of these women’s body and soul is broken,’ Ismael, executive director of Yazda, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. ‘And yet the international system is failing to embrace them and help them return to normal life,’ said Ismael, who will speak at the Foundation’s Trust Conference on modern slavery in Brussels on Wednesday.” [\(Reuters\)](#)

**ISRAEL/PALESTINE**

**May 27: Genesis Prize Foundation to infuse \$1 Million in Women’s Rights in Israel**

“The Genesis Prize Foundation announced Sunday the start of a \$1 million grant competition aimed at supporting Israeli non-profit organizations working to advance women’s equality. The competition, being run in collaboration with Israeli philanthropist Morris Kahn and administered by Matan-United Way Israel, is open to Israeli NGOs working in this field. “The Genesis Foundation is committed more than ever to advancing the cause of women’s equality,” Sana Britavsky, deputy CEO of the Genesis Prize Foundation told The Jerusalem Post.” [\(The Jerusalem Post\)](#)

**June 4: Dozens of Top Doctors Urge Israel to Let Cancer Patients Leave Gaza for Treatment**

“Around 45 women waited 6 months or more to be treated in Israel in the last year, says rights group. Delayed treatment, oncologists charge, could lead to worsening of disease and death Thirty one leading oncologists from hospitals around Israel called on the Health Ministry and the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories to authorize female cancer patients in the Gaza Strip to enter Israel and the West Bank for urgent, life-saving treatment. The doctors’ demand comes in the wake of what they say are increasing difficulties these women have been experiencing in obtaining ongoing medical care, due to tighter Israeli restrictions on exit permits from the Strip” . [\(Haaretz\)](#)

### **June 5: Arab Towns in Israel Witness Increased Crime, Violence against Women**

“Violence and murder have run rampant in Palestinian communities in Israel. Naila Awwad, the director of the Association of Women against Violence in Israel, blames the Israeli security institutions for these crimes. She told Al-Monitor, “The Palestinians live as a national minority in these areas and suffer discrimination and marginalization. We believe Israeli security institutions do not care about uncontrolled weapons and the pursuit and punishment of murderers.” [\(Al Monitor\)](#)

## **LEBANON**

### **May 29: Women’s groups urge quota in next elections**

“Leading women’s rights activists called Tuesday for a quota on women’s representation in government to be implemented in Lebanon’s next general elections, in four years’ time, after only six women took parliamentary seats in the 2018 race. President of the National Commission for Lebanese Women Claudine Aoun Roukoz requested a share in the next government,” including a mandatory quota to increase women’s participation, according to a statement released by Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri’s press office, following a meeting between Hariri and Aoun Roukoz.” [\(The Daily Star\)](#)

### **May 31: Lebanese women determined to continue to fight for more political representation**

“Earlier this month, Lebanon voted in parliamentary elections to fill seats based on a new system of proportional representation. After the ballots were counted, women occupied six of the 128 seats. This small number looks even smaller when one takes into account that there were 111 female candidates out of 976 total. These figures indicate how difficult it is for women to become legislative representatives and decision-makers. Previously, with so few female parliamentarians and candidates, some believed that women themselves were the problem. That is, they simply preferred not to run. The May 6 election showed, however, that women do want to take part in national decision-making, but when they set out to do so, they find obstacles in their way.” [\(Al Monitor\)](#)

### **June 1: Lebanese-Palestinian on List of 100 Most influential people in Gender Policy in 2018**

“Lebanese-Palestinian gender rights activist Lina Abirafeh’s name features alongside the likes of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai on the a new list of the world’s 100 most influential people in gender policy in 2018. Initiated by Apolitical, a platform that connects public servants worldwide, the list honoring women and men working toward a more equitable society was published on May 23 and referenced by the United Nations, the World Bank and other major global institutions. For Abirafeh, who sees gender-based violence as the “biggest crime against humanity one could ever imagine,” the nomination is a call to action for Lebanon and the region”. [\(Al Bawaba\)](#)

### **June 3: Lebanese woman detained for insulting Egyptians in viral video**

“An Egyptian court has renewed the detention of a Lebanese woman for a further 15 days pending an investigation into charges including insulting Egyptians. Sunday’s court decision comes days after the country’s top prosecutor ordered the detention of Mona el-Mazbough after she posted a video on Facebook lashing out at the state for the prevalence of widespread begging and unchallenged sexual harassment.” [\(The Washington Post\)](#)

## MOROCCO

### **June 3: First North African Woman to be elected as President of the Association for Middle East Women's Studies**

Professor Fatima Sadiqi, from Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University in Fez, Morocco and a former Fellow at the Wilson Center has been elected as President of AMEWS (Association for Middle East Women's Studies), which is based in the US. This is the first time that a North African scholar and non-resident in the US is elected for this job. She will be taking over AMEWS at a time when strong leadership is needed to confront women's challenges in the MENA region. We wish her all the best in her endeavors at AMEWS. ([The Wilson Center](#))

## QATAR

### **June 5: Qatar Airways Chief Executive Says a Woman is Incapable of Handling his Job**

"Only a man can handle the challenges of leading Qatar Airways', the carrier's chief executive Akbar Al Baker said at a press conference in Sydney. The admission was made only a few minutes after Mr Al Baker was named chairman of the International Air Transport Association's board of governors, a male-dominated sphere in aviation. 'Of course, it has to be led by a man because it is a very challenging position,' Mr Al Baker said in response to a question on how the industry body will tackle the problem of gender inequality in key management positions, especially in the Middle East." ([The National](#))

## SAUDI ARABIA

### **May 29: Saudi Arabia to Criminalize Sexual Harassment**

"The Shura Council of Saudi Arabia, the country's formal consultative body, has approved a law to criminalize sexual harassment in the kingdom. The aims of the measure are "fighting the crime of harassment, preventing it, punishing perpetrators and protecting victims in order to preserve the privacy, dignity and individual freedoms as guaranteed by Islamic jurisprudence and regulations in place". The Interior Ministry drafted it after instructions from King Salman, according to local media reports. However, with men and women barred from intermingling in the strictly conservative Islamic kingdom, Saudis on social media have, largely, responded with humor." ([BBC](#))

### **June 1: Vogue Arabia Sparks Anger with Cover Featuring Saudi Princess While Women Activists Remain in Jail**

"Vogue Arabia has been criticized for its June cover featuring a Saudi princess to celebrate the 'trailblazing women of Saudi Arabia', published just after a dozen women's rights activists were arrested. The magazine's cover, unveiled on social media platforms on Wednesday, features Princess Hayfa Bint Abdullah Al Saud, daughter of the late King Abdullah, sitting in a vintage Mercedes convertible along with the caption 'Driving Force'. The image was met with immediate condemnation by people pointing out that although the conservative kingdom is set to lift the longstanding driving ban for women on 24 June, a dozen or so women's rights activists have just been arrested on charges of "encroaching on religious and national constants". ([The Independent](#))

### **June 3: Saudi 'Temporarily' Frees Activists who want Women to be Able to Drive**

"Saudi Arabia has "temporarily" released eight activists arrested last month for protesting against the country's ban on women driving. The five women and three men were arrested for allegedly undermining 'the security and stability of the Kingdom, its social peace and national unity,' Saudi Arabia Public Prosecution said in a statement on Saturday. But nine other women's rights activists remain in custody due to confessions and 'sufficient evidence against them,' the statement said." ([CNN](#))



#### **June 4: Saudi Arabia has Issued its first driver's license to 10 women**

"Saudi Arabia issued its first driver's licenses to 10 women on Monday as the kingdom prepared to lift the world's only ban on women driving in three weeks, but some who campaigned for the right to drive remain under arrest. A government statement said the 10 women who were issued licenses already held driving licenses from other countries, including the U.S., U.K., Lebanon and Canada. They took a brief driving test and eye exam before being issued the licenses at the General Department of Traffic in the capital, Riyadh. International media were not present for the event. ([TIME](#))

#### **SYRIA**

##### **May 26: Amid Syria's Horror, a New Force Emerges: the Women of Idlib**

Many of these informal civil initiatives are led by women, who have been unexpectedly thrust into leadership roles by the war. This is due in part to the absence of fathers, husbands and sons, who are fighting, missing or dead, and to the breakdown of traditional societal conventions and taboos governing what women may or may not do. Overall, the Syrian conflict has disproportionately affected women and girls. In particular, extended control by conservative extremist groups has exacerbated the exclusion of women from leadership roles. But women in Idlib are pushing back. "Facing attacks from all sides, civil society in Idlib continues to operate with remarkable effectiveness and determination," the report says. "In areas best-known internationally for massacres, there are untold stories of hundreds of groups providing the services civilians need to survive." ([The Guardian](#))

#### **TUNISIA**

##### **May 26: Tunisia's leading woman politician who found a second act after the revolution**

"Maya Jribi, the first woman to lead a political party in Tunisia, passed away in the coastal town of Rades on May 19 after more than three decades as a champion of civil society and political participation for women. She was 58. Her family did not release the exact cause of Jribi's death, but it has been reported that she was suffering from a form of cancer, which forced her to step down as leader of the Republican Party in 2017. Her funeral last Sunday in Ben Arous attracted thousands of supporters. Tunisian president Beji Caid Essebsi praised her 'honesty and loyalty' in serving the country and her lifelong support for 'the values of democracy, justice and equalit'." ([The National](#))

#### **TURKEY**

##### **June 1: Women Moving from Background to the Vanguard of Turkish Politics**

"Political parties in Turkey are looking to garner women's vote more than ever by basing their election policies and promises heavily on female-related issues, particularly in economic and educational areas. Moreover, this election will see the highest ever number of women candidates running for Parliament. On May 21, political parties released their candidate lists for the June 24 parliamentary elections, revealing that a total of 904 women from seven political parties are running to become parliamentarians, a record high in Turkey's history. The number constitutes 21.5 percent of all candidates running for Parliament, proving that women's participation in politics is continuing to increase." ([The Daily Sabah](#))

## OPINION/ANALYSIS

### **May 26: In the Kingdom of Men**

“According to We Will Stop Femicide, the number of women murdered by a partner or relative in Turkey increased from 237 in 2013 to 409 in 2017. The group logged 130 deaths from January through April of this year. The Femicide Map, which has been tracking violence against Turkish women since 2010, reported that nearly 2,000 women have been killed across the country in the last eight years. Many blame the increase on the current president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and his Islamic-rooted Justice and Development Party. In recent years he and others in power have made public statements that degrade women. In July 2014 Bulent Arinc, then a deputy prime minister, said that a woman should not laugh in public to “preserve her decency.” In 2016 Mr. Erdogan called women without children ‘deficient’.” ([The New York Times](#))

### **May 27: Middle East Needs its MeToo Movement for Minorities**

“After Israel won the Eurovision Song Competition with Netta Barzilai’s “Toy”, a feminist empowerment song that takes a strong stance against sexual harassment, the Me Too movement has now conquered both Israel and Europe. Across the political establishment in Israel, from left to right, everyone is praising Barzilai for her talent as well as her promotion of diversity and feminism. Even in the Arab world, the Israeli Foreign Ministry claimed that Barzilai’s song has its fans. At this time, as Iranian women continue to protest against compulsory hijab, women in the Arab world speak out against sexual harassment during the Hajj with the Mosque Me Too movement, Israel’s prime minister dances to Netta’s chicken beat in solidarity with the Me Too movement and plus size women across the world feel inspired that for once they can be judged by their talents rather than how they look, one must ponder, when will the minorities in Pakistan and Bangladesh also get to take part in the Me Too movement?” ([The Hill](#))

Additional MENA Women’s News Briefs are available [here](#).

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