



# MENA WOMEN NEWS BRIEF



AUGUST 1<sup>ST</sup> – AUGUST 15<sup>TH</sup>, 2018

## BAHRAIN

### **August 9: Sexually-Harassed Bahraini Women Only Themselves to Blame, Officials Imply**

Bahraini officials have issued a warning to two women who were sexually harassed by a group of men at a public swimming pool, local newspaper *Gulf Daily News* reported. A senior official told the outlet on Wednesday that the women had been cautioned after a video of the incident over the weekend garnered attention on social media. In the viral video, the two women can be seen attempting to leave a pool while a crowd of rowdy men grope them and shout abuse at them. The footage sparked outrage online with many Twitter users calling on authorities to investigate the incident. ([Al Bawaba](#))

## EGYPT

### **August 8: Egypt: Amal Fathy referral to trial a shocking case of injustice**

Today's referral to trial of Amal Fathy, an Egyptian activist arrested for posting a video online sharing her experiences of sexual harassment, is a shocking case of injustice, Amnesty International said. "Instead of prosecuting perpetrators of violence against women, the Egyptian authorities are persecuting Amal Fathy for speaking out against sexual harassment. It is a shocking case of injustice. She is a human rights defender who told her truth to the world and wanted to highlight the vital issue of women's safety in Egypt. She is not a criminal." On 9 May, Amal Fathy posted a video on her Facebook page in which she spoke about the prevalence of sexual harassment in Egypt, and criticized the government's failure to protect women. She also criticized the government for deteriorating human rights, socioeconomic conditions and public services. ([Amnesty International](#))

**August 15: Egypt's feminists laud mass appointment of women as top judges**  
Women's rights activists and jurists hailed a decision by the Supreme Judiciary Council earlier this month to promote 16 female judges, expressing hope that women in top judicial positions will make their mark on the gender-sensitive issues that come before the courts. Yet, Egypt's female jurists still have to break into the all-powerful State Council. The council issues legal opinions and reviews bills, resolutions and draft contracts for the state and public entities. Nevertheless, Gebali sees the recent appointments as a success story for women in the judicial sector. ([Al-Monitor](#))

## IRAN

### **August 3: In Iran Protests, Women Stand Up, Lift Their Hijab, For Their Rights**

Atefeh Ahmadi, a 29-year-old freelance translator from Tehran, says she was intrigued when she started seeing the resurgence of images and videos of women standing on electrical boxes in public squares and removing their headscarves...Despite the generally hard line taken by the authorities, Ahmadi believes the protests have gained momentum, and won't stop until the government addresses the fundamental problem. "Because it seems that the state has a problem with women's bodies," she says. "Everywhere that a woman's body is involved, there will be a reaction from the state. And that will spark more protests." ([NPR](#))

### **August 4: Iranian activist says government wanted to "break" women who joined campaign**

"...I want to say that the Islamic Republic of Iran didn't only want to break me -- they wanted to break the Iranian women who joined my campaign," Alinejad said. "One of the women, she took off her head scarf and said that you arrested me because I joined 'White Wednesdays' campaign," Alinejad said. "I took off my hijab and I say louder -- no to compulsory hijab. By threatening me, by putting me in prison, you cannot keep me silent." ([CBS News](#))



### **August 12: Iranian female photographer defies football match restrictions**

An Iranian photographer has caught the world's attention after she defied restrictions that prevent women from covering men's sporting events. Parisa Pourtaherian, 26, was unable to enter the Vahdani Stadium in northern Iran to cover a top-flight football match last month. But she was undeterred and covered the game from a nearby rooftop using a long camera lens. Although there's no official ban on women going to sporting events in Iran, it is rare for them to attend as they are often refused entry. ([BBC News](#))

## **IRAQ**

### **August 6: Women must lead Iraq's anti-corruption fight, Baghdad mayor says**

When she was a top civil servant, Zikra Alwash worried about education. Now, as mayor of the nation's capital Baghdad, it is corruption that dominates her working hours. As the city's first female mayor, she is in office at a time of public disdain for many politicians. Last month, people took to the streets to protest against corruption, particularly in southern Iraq, and the need for better public services and government. With the capital still the nation's power centre, she has made the battle against corruption – and women's role in it – her biggest campaign....As such, reversing decades of endemic corruption, she says, offers an opportunity to boost women's involvement in a fragile political system. As the first female mayor in the Iraqi capital's history she has crossed such barriers, although the task of governing a war-torn city remains mammoth, regardless of gender. ([The National](#))

### **August 8: Bride's Killing in Iraq Shows New Law Needed**

The horrific case of an Iraqi woman apparently murdered at home should prompt Iraq's new parliament, once formed, to finally pass a draft domestic violence law which has been pending since 2015. According to [Iraqi media](#) and BBC Arabic, one day last week a bridegroom returned his bride to her parents the day after their wedding, complaining that she was not a virgin. Media reports claim that upon hearing the accusation, a family member beat her to death. Media reports say that police have arrested a male relative. While the man will likely now face trial for murder, it is possible that he may benefit from a reduced sentence under a provision in Iraq's penal code allowing for shorter sentences for violent acts – including murder – for so-called “honorable motives.” ([Human Rights Watch](#))

### **August 14: Five female members of IS 'morality police' arrested in Mosul: Ministry**

The Interior Ministry of Iraq on Tuesday announced they had arrested five women in Mosul for working with the Islamic State (IS) during their reign in the country started in 2014, all of whom were working with the group's infamous all-female “morality police.” “They worked for al-Hisbah,” as part of the all-female religious police operating under IS which surveilled people's adherence to a strict moral code. ([Kurdistan 24](#))

## **ISRAEL/PALESTINE**

### **August 3: Palestinian girls nurture 'Flower' magazine behind bars**

Despite tight controls and risk of heavy punishment, a group of Palestinian girls in Israel's Hasharon Prison managed to publish a magazine to tell their story from behind bars, and they now hope to revive it. They decided to call the magazine “Zahrat,” which means “flower” in Arabic; it is the name given to girls in Israeli prisons. The first two issues of the magazine focused on cultural, social and religious topics. It was in the third issue that the contributors started to open up about their suffering inside the prison. A copy of the last issue was smuggled out by Malak al-Ghaliz, the youngest prisoner at 15, when she got out of the prison on Dec. 29, 2017. Ghaliz expressed hope that one day the prisoners' institutions and human rights organizations will take an interest in the magazine, saying, “...The magazine is very important to us because, despite all the hardships we faced, we continued writing.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

**August 6: New Israeli Bill Fining Prostitution Clients May Change Thousands of Women's Lives**

After many years during which the government, police and courts lent a hand to the quiet institutionalization of the prostitution industry across the country, the government finally woke up, and in a revolutionary and precedent-setting move initiated legislation that may lead to the uprooting of this social ill, moving Israeli society towards enhanced justice and equality. Today [the face of prostitution] is based on Israeli women from all reaches of society, including women who suffer from hunger or are overwhelmed by debt (most of them mothers), women addicted to drugs, at-risk youths, transgender people, youths thrown out of their homes due to their sexual orientation and asylum seekers. ([Haaretz](#))

**August 9: Israeli General: Army Should Have Reacted Stronger When Paratroopers Turned Back on Female Instructor**

Maj. Gen. Moti Almoz, who heads the Israel Defense Forces Manpower Directorate, said Thursday that the military could have reacted with a stronger response to the 30 religious soldiers training to be paratroopers who turned their backs on a female instructor. Following his meeting with the Israel Women's Network, Almoz said that "cases involving the exclusion of women and harm to women in the army constitute a serious problem for commanders." It was also reported that one of the soldiers' instructor had allowed them to lower heads when the female instructor was talking. "This is a mistake made by the instructor," the spokesman said. ([Haaretz](#))

**August 12: Two Women Of The Wall Activists Detained During Elul Service**

The wife of a paratrooper who liberated the Temple Mount in 1967 as well as a male activist for the Women of the Wall organization were both detained on Sunday morning by police at the Western Wall, although the circumstances behind the incidents are unclear. Women of the Wall have faced persistent harassment from ultra-Orthodox women and girls in the women's section throughout their services. Protesters blew whistles, shouted and verbally harassed the more than 100 women who participated in the service. Women of the Wall said that in light of the harassment during their monthly prayer services, they "came prepared today with female bodyguards trained in conflict management and de-escalation." The organization also accused the police of failing to protect them against the harassment. ([Jerusalem Post](#))

**JORDAN**

**August 1: Maaytah calls for more engagement of women in Arab world's politics**

Minister of Political and Parliamentary Affairs Musa Maaytah on Tuesday called for revisiting laws to give women more say and a role in politics and in the legislature. Attending a meeting of the Arab Women Parliamentarians Network (Ra'edat), Maaytah called for half of the Parliament to be made up of women to "justly reflect the society". In a Ra'edat statement to The Jordan Times, Maaytah described women as "less corrupt than men", commending women parliamentarians' performance and role. Former MP Rula Hroub, who is also Ra'edat's chairperson, was also quoted in the statement as saying that woman's participation and engagement in the Arab world's politics falls below the global average by 5 points, despite the progress achieved within the last decade. ([Jordan Times](#))

**August 2: Women groups hail opening of shelter for abused women**

The Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) on Tuesday commended the Ministry of Social Development and its partners on the opening of the shelter "Amneh House" ["safe" in Arabic] which will be open to women whose lives are threatened in relation to so-called family honour violence. "The aim is to abandon the idea of protective custody and to integrate and protect at-risk women in an environment closer to that of a family home," the statement continued. ([Jordan Times](#))



### **August 13: Activists urge amendment to unfair, 'male-centred' Civil Status Law**

Though labelled by women rights activists as “male-centred”, the Civil Status Law has the whole family’s interest at heart and extensively considers social norms and issues in cases of underage marriages, Judge Ashraf Omari from the Supreme Judge Department argued. The remark came as a response to legal expert Hala Ahed’s claim last week that the Civil Status Law is “inequitable to women” and “does not meet the modern needs and lifestyles” with its “old-school” legislations stemmed from Fiqh Sources (Islamic studies that derive religious rulings from Quran and Sunna to have deeper look into matters of jurisprudence). The law, which was build around articles and rules from various Fiqh sources, could have been more just to women if legislators had chosen modern texts from modern scholars that considers women’s needs today not only as mothers but also as breadwinners, Ahed said. ([Jordan Times](#))

## **LEBANON**

### **August 3: Sexism in Lebanon’s blood donation system**

Any resident of Lebanon is familiar with the regular urgent appeals on social media for blood donations to help patients facing surgeries, car accident victims and women giving birth. But in some cases, women are turned away when they try to respond... Individual hospitals are free to set stricter standards than the ministry-issued criteria, which Saad [spokesman for Donner Sang Compter, an NGO that aims to increase blood donations in Lebanon] said has led to a patchwork system that can be confusing to potential donors. He said the experience of being turned away may lead to a vicious cycle in which fewer women volunteer to donate. ([The Daily Star](#))

## **MOROCCO**

### **August 1: Moroccan Female Entrepreneurs Tackle Misconceptions, Challenges Head On**

In Morocco, entrepreneurship has been on the rise as an economic survival tactic for those seeking to escape the reaches of the country’s high unemployment rate. Although the government has taken initiatives to assist young start-ups and improve the economy, it is still difficult to compete and thrive as an entrepreneur, especially for women. ([Morocco World News](#))

## **SAUDI ARABIA**

### **August 1: 120 female guides to serve pilgrims this Hajj season**

At least 120 women are getting ready to perform guide duties for Hajj pilgrims this year, in addition to other duties adopted by the women’s division of the National Tawafa Establishment for Pilgrims of Arab Countries (ARBHAJ), which was awarded the “ISO” certificate twice in the past. ([Al Arabiya](#))

### **August 2: Saudi women join the challenge during Hajj Hackathon in Jeddah**

The Hajj Hackathon organized by the Saudi Federation for Cybersecurity, Programming and Drones, being organized in Jeddah (from 1 - 3 August) has witnessed significant presence of Saudi women who have joined the event following long hours of study and training. While the Hajj Hackathon program brought together programmers and developers from 51 countries – in the largest gathering of innovators in the region – the enthusiasm of young Saudi women, assigned to a number of teams as per competition rules, was obvious. ([Al Arabiya](#))

### **August 12: EU seeks details from Saudi Arabia on women human rights arrests amid Canada row**

The European Union has asked Saudi Arabia to shed light on the arrests and charges facing women human rights activists, saying that the detainees should be granted due process to defend themselves. “The EU has been engaging constructively with the Saudi authorities seeking clarification on the circumstances surrounding the arrests of women human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia, notably with regard to the specific accusations brought against them,” spokeswoman for EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini. ([Middle East Monitor](#))



## SYRIA

### **August 3: UN-ESCWA and Italy partner to support empowerment of women refugees from Syria**

The Government of Italy committed to a contribution of 6 million Euros to the overall initiative, including 200.000 Euros disbursed in favor of projects implemented by ESCWA, beginning in August 2018 through September 2020. The Government of Italy committed to a contribution of 6 million Euros to the overall initiative, including 200.000 Euros disbursed in favor of projects implemented by ESCWA, beginning in August 2018 through September 2020. During the next two years, the project will build the capacity of women leaders among refugees from Syria and women representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt. ([Relief Web](#))

### **August 9: Azaz conference explores boosting role of Syrian women**

The General Women's Conference for the Support and Empowerment of Women in the Aleppo Euphrates Shield area, which is under the control of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), convened July 25 in Azaz – a city in Aleppo's northern countryside. The conference resulted in the creation of a new organization for women's political, social and economic empowerment in Syria's opposition-held areas. Activist Nivin Hotary, a member of the women's group affiliated with the Stabilization Committee, told Al-Monitor that the conference brought together women from all over Syria, including many displaced from areas such as Deir Ez-Zor and eastern Ghouta now living in the Euphrates Shield area. Hotary added that the projects proposed during the conference included promoting communication among Syrian women in opposition-held areas, holding cultural seminars to promote women's capacities and skills, and communicating with pro-opposition civil institutions such as local councils to promote women's roles. ([Al-Monitor](#))

### **August 13: Syrian qanun player Maya Youssef on finding her voice in the darkest of times**

Maya Youssef had never written a piece of music before when she sat down at her qanun, fighting the tears rolling down her face, and began playing the first notes of what would become Syrian Dreams – the title track of her debut album – an uncontrollable emotional outpouring inspired by watching the images of war ravaging her homeland. ([The National](#))

## TUNISIA

### **August 13: Tunisian president proposes inheritance equality for women, with exceptions**

Tunisia's president on Monday proposed giving women equal inheritance rights despite protests from thousands of people objecting to any challenge to Islamic law. But in a show how divided society remains, thousands demonstrated on Saturday in front of parliament against any changes to inheritance rules. The current system is based on Islamic law which typically allows men to inherit double what a woman would receive. "I propose equality inheritance to become law," President Beji Caid Essebsi said in a speech. But in the face of the opposition from conservatives, he left the door open for some exceptions, saying families who wished to continue the allocation based on Islamic law would be able to do so. Thousands of women and men rallied in central Tunis in the evening to demand a law granting women equal heritage rights. ([Reuters](#))

## UAE

### **August 2: More UAE private firms expected to cover maternity insurance**

Women in the UAE will likely benefit from an increase in maternity insurance as more private companies provide coverage, according to the CEO of Abu Dhabi-based healthcare group Capital Health. "Insurance is starting to cover maternity more for women who work in the private sector. Five years ago, less companies were covering maternity. Now, the trend is seeing more companies covering maternity, which removes challenges for employees to pay out of their own pockets," he said. ([Arabian Business](#))





## YEMEN

### **August 3: Hundreds of pregnant women risk death in Yemen: UN**

Hundreds of pregnant women in the Yemeni city of Hodeidah risk dying as the escalating conflict puts medical care out of reach in a country with one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates, the United Nations said. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) said pregnant women were at "extreme risk" as it became harder to access care, with the maternal death rate likely to have doubled from its 2015 tally of 385 deaths per 100,000 live births. ([Middle East Monitor](#))

## OPINION/ANALYSIS

### **August 10: How US Sanctions Impede the Women's Movement in Iran**

Given the threat of war between the US and Iran is more real than ever before, and the reimposition of economic warfare via sanctions—which promises to destabilize the country—women's rights activists fear their hard-earned gains over the last few years may be in peril if the Iranian government adopts a harsher security approach toward civil society. Women's rights advocates have often been accused by hardliners of seeking to adopt Western values, which undermine the Islamic values of the country. As such, they've worked hard to ensure their demands are rooted locally, while also reflecting universal rights principles. ([Atlantic Council](#))

### **August 10: Empowerment through employment for Syrian refugee women in Jordan**

With five children to support and a husband who was unable to work, Saleh was desperate to find work. She enrolled in the centre's cash-for-work programme and trained as a tailor... She had the necessary skills to get a job in the tailoring industry, but she, and many other women, were unaware of how to secure a work permit. Only 3 per cent of the work permits issued to Syrian refugees went to women in 2017. To fill this gender gap, UN Women, in partnership with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), began hosting awareness sessions and job fairs specifically geared towards women. ([UN Women](#))

### **August 11: Divorce, violence and financial independence**

"As soon as I was able to support myself, I decided to end my relationship with him — you're better off without a man who does not properly provide for his wife and children," says Eman,\* about her decision to seek a divorce. "And a man who opposes a woman working knows that the income she will get through her job will make her strong and end her dependence on him."... When the spaces in which people can express themselves are closed down and economic pressures are on the rise, Ezzat explains that this often means that the home becomes the only space for releasing anger and repression, with dire consequences for women. ([Mada Masr](#))

### **August 14: Saudi women can drive. But will they be allowed to take the wheel?**

Some see the right to drive as a concession from the male-dominated government that raises a familiar question: what happens when the right policy arrives for the wrong reasons?...Several of the male Careem Captains I talked to in Jeddah claimed they had passengers who said they would never ride with a female driver, but Al Aswad dismisses them. "You have all the reactions," she says. "You have the good, the bad, the people who are afraid." We drive by a cluster of businessmen on the sidewalk, and they smile approvingly and wave. "But the people will get used to it." ([Elle](#))

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