



MENA WOMEN NEWS BRIEF



JULY 12TH – JULY 31ST, 2018

EGYPT

July 23: Egyptian Women Take to Parkour to Challenge Social Norms

“Once a week, a group of Egyptian women gathers at an abandoned park in a Cairo, to climb walls and jump around in the strenuous physical discipline known as Parkour, while also challenging the country’s conservative social norms...Ten women took part in last Friday’s training, which focused on building upper body strength and different methods of dealing with surroundings. Curious crowds, accustomed to women taking a low profile in Egypt, often congregate to watch the training, sometimes taking pictures and filming. But the women keep up the training unhindered, insisting that no sport is exclusive for men.” ([The New York Post](#))

July 31: Harassed, Mutilated, and Disenfranchised

“The #MeToo debate shows that sexual violence is suppressed, covered up and downplayed even in societies with functioning democratic institutions...Egypt shows how much more difficult the struggle against patriarchal culture is in an autocracy. Mob rapes are often more brutal and dangerous than assaults by individuals, and experts say that opportunistic crowds often participate in these assaults. The perpetrators egg each other on and humiliate and dehumanize their victims...The pervasive violence and contempt that Egyptian women experience on a daily basis makes their lives a living hell.” ([Der Spiegel](#))

IRAN

July 20: The Women who Defied Iran

“Four years ago, the Iranian journalist Masih Alinejad began posting photos of herself on Facebook without the traditional Muslim head covering known as the hijab. Although Alinejad had left Iran by then, women inside the country followed with their own photos under the hashtag #MyStealthyFreedom.” Foreign Policy’s Podcast this week is about “How Alinejad’s social media campaign has shaken Iran”. ([Foreign Policy](#))

July 22: An Iranian Caricaturist Got a Visa Despite the Travel Ban. Now She’s Drawing Trump

“To listen to Ms. Sheykhi is to hear another account of women in a country where the government has relentlessly tightened its grip on both women and freedom of expression. It is also to hear about someone who says she was ‘a noisy girl with infinite energy’ when she was a child. Now she seems to have infinite fearlessness.” ([The New York Times](#))

July 22: Violence against Women at Center of Debate on Landmark Bill in Iran

“Iranian Parliamentarian Tayyebeh Siavoshi of the Provision for Security Services for Women Bill told Al-Monitor “Both we and the Vice Presidency for Women and Family Affairs have repeatedly asked the judiciary to send this bill to the parliament. It has been almost three years and we have yet to receive this bill.” Iranian parliamentarians originally discussed the importance of drafting this bill back in December 2012, during President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s last year in office. After President Hassan Rouhani took office in August 2013, following up on this bill became a priority of the Vice Presidency for Women and Family Affairs.” ([Al Monitor](#))



IRAQ

July 24: Sisters are cooking for themselves at Iraq's Women-Only Restaurant

"The women-only restaurant, with its all-female staff, was opened this month by 23-year-old business graduate Tara Mohammed Ihssan who was fed up of unwanted attention on nights out with friends in northern Iraq. 'If you want to go out, it is so uncomfortable because everyone is staring at you,' she told Reuters. 'So I have always thought about doing something like this for me and for the rest of the girls to feel comfortable...I find it unfair as all the cafes here are just for men, why can't you accept that there is this cafe for ladies?'" [\(Reuters\)](#)

ISRAEL/PALESTINE

July 27: Dress Codes and Separate Entrances: Gender Segregation in Israeli Universities Expands Beyond the Classrooms

"Recent consideration of the policies of the ultra-Orthodox programs by the Council for Higher Education has revealed that many institutions, particularly Bar-Ilan University in Ramat-Gan, which has a religious orientation, violated a directive limiting gender segregation to the classroom. Some academic institutions instituted gender segregation at campus entrances, in hallways and in libraries, making it a more natural phenomenon. Despite large-scale violations, the council has made do with a relatively mild response, but a source suggested that prior violations would be taken into account if the violations resurface." [\(Haaretz\)](#)

July 28: Making History: First Arab Woman Appointed Dean at Hebrew University

"In the midst of the controversy over the Nation-State Law and the demotion of Arabic from official language status, Prof. Mona Khoury-Kassabri has been appointed dean of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's School of Social Work. She is the first Arab woman to be appointed dean at the Hebrew University, and may well be the only Arab woman to serve as dean at any university in Israel." [\(The Jerusalem Post\)](#)

July 29: Ahed Tamimi; Palestinian Teenager who Slapped Israeli Soldier, is Released from Jail

"Prison time is almost a rite of passage for some Palestinian activists, and Ahed Tamimi, the West Bank teenage firebrand who rose to international prominence after she kicked and slapped an Israeli soldier, tried to use hers profitably. 'I learned a lot,' Ms. Tamimi, 17, said hours after her release on Sunday from an Israeli prison, where she served an eight-month term...She now plans to study law with an eye to suing Israel in international courts for what she describes as the violations and war crimes of the occupation. 'Of course I'm not going to forget the cause,' she said in an interview, 'but I'm going to invest in my studies, because knowledge is the strongest weapon for a struggler.'" [\(The New York Times\)](#)

July 30: IDF Pushes Back against Commanders Trying to Enforce Female Modesty

"The Israeli army is warning commanders to implement [IDF policy](#) of protecting the rights of female soldiers as reports that they are being excluded for religious reasons have increased in recent months. 'Such strict [practices] are in violation of army orders and policy, do unnecessary harm to wide-scale groups serving [in the army] and are inconsistent with the IDF commanders' responsibility,' wrote the Head of the IDF's Manpower Directorate Maj.-Gen. Moti Almoz." [\(The Jerusalem Post\)](#)

July 31: Israeli Court Jails Arab Poet for Online Incitement to Terrorism

"An Israeli court jailed an Israeli Arab poet for five months on Tuesday after convicting her of incitement to terrorism for a poem and remarks she posted on social media during a wave of Palestinian street attacks. Dareen Tatour, 36, posted on Facebook and YouTube a video of herself reading out her poem 'Resist, My People, Resist', as a soundtrack to footage of masked Palestinian youths throwing stones and firebombs at Israeli soldiers." [\(Reuters\)](#)

LEBANON

July 18: EU Mission Calls for Election Quota for Women

“The European Union Election Observation Mission emphasized the lack of political representation for women at a presentation of its final report on Lebanon’s May 6 parliamentary elections Tuesday. Chief Observer Elena Valenciano told The Daily Star after the presentation that a proposed quota for women on candidate lists was of greater significance than other electoral rules. ‘Why are all quotas respected but not that which for me is the most important, which is equal representation between men and women?’ Valenciano asked. ‘Society is divided into many confessions but primarily divided in two – men and women – so this is the most important quota.’ ‘A democracy that does not represent half of its citizens by gender is a democracy that needs to be improved,’ she said.” ([The Daily Star](#))

July 31: Domestic Violence in Lebanon: Prevalent yet Underrated

“Lebanese women are often seen as privileged compared to those in other Arab countries. The reality, however, is that they’re still far behind in terms of gender equality. According to the gender gap index, Lebanon ranks third to last in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region; only Syria and Yemen have a worse gender gap ranking. Domestic violence is a prevalent yet underrated problem in Lebanon. Lebanon has witnessed several high profile cases of husbands beating their wives to death. KAFA, the leading Lebanese NGO advocating for women’s rights, receives 2,600 calls in its domestic abuse helpline each year.” ([Annahar](#))

LIBYA

July 17: Silenced Voices: Libyan Women Human Rights Defenders under Attack

“Libyan women activists, bloggers and journalists are increasingly being silenced as they face gender-based violence in the form of physical assault, abductions and sexual violence, as well as smear campaigns, gender-related slurs and attempts at intimidation, Amnesty International said today. Despite repeatedly reiterating their commitment to respect human rights, Libyan authorities are failing to protect women from gender-based violence at the hands of militias and armed groups and to ensure that they are able to express themselves freely.” ([Relief Web](#))

MOROCCO

July 30: Moroccan Activists Oppose ‘Be a Man’ Campaign against Women’s Swimwear

“After the ‘Be a free woman’ hashtag (#Soisunefemmelibre) lit up Twitter in Morocco, Moroccan activists have launched a [petition](#) to oppose the ‘Be a man’ (#KounRajl) campaign, which encouraged men in Morocco to tell their female relatives to cover up at the beach. The petition, launched on Thursday, called on the head of government and Morocco’s political parties to intervene and abolish the hashtag perceived to be against the freedoms of women. According to the petition, the ‘misogynistic’ campaign is not the first of its kind. “Last year, a ‘militia’ raid on a beach in Agadir forced women in swimwear to cover themselves, including foreign tourists,” reads the petition.” ([Morocco World News](#))

July 31: Morocco Assigns Women Marriage Notaries for First Time

“The Moroccan Ministry of Justice announced that it is recruiting 299 women as legal marriage notaries for the first time in the country, a profession that has hereto been reserved for men. Men also typically handle inheritance issues, divorce and guardianship cases in addition to marriage contracts. This was because under Shariah, a woman's testimony is equal to half that of a man. Morocco’s King, Mohammad VI, pronounced a decree this year that allows women across the country to carry out several duties under Shariah such as documenting witness testimony in courts, handling family cases and real estate transactions.” ([Gulf News](#))

SAUDI ARABIA



July 14: Saudi Arabian Women ‘Arrested for Hugging’ Singer Majid al-Mohandis

“A woman in Saudi Arabia has been arrested after running on stage to hug a male singer during a concert, according to reports. Majid al-Mohandis was performing at a festival in the western city of Taif when the woman darted on to the stage. Videos posted online showed her holding on to Mr Mohandis while security staff tried to pull her off him. Women in Saudi Arabia are not allowed to mix in public with men who are unrelated to them.” [\(BBC News\)](#)

July 16: Saudi Women Will Now Learn to Fly After Gaining Right to Drive

“An aviation school in Saudi Arabia will open its doors to women, following the kingdom’s move to allow female drivers to legally hit the roads last month. ‘We are no longer living in the era where women were allowed [to work] in limited arenas. All avenues are now opened for women,’ applicant Dalal Yashar, who aims to work as a civil pilot, [told Reuters](#). ‘If you have the appetite, you have the ability.’ Oxford Aviation Academy has begun accepting applications from Saudi women who wish to begin training starting in September. The branch of the school offering classes to women will open in the eastern city of Dammam.” [\(Newsweek\)](#)

July 17: Women in Saudi Arabia can Work, Party - and Now Drive. But is their Newfound Freedom all it seems?

“For all the hopeful rhetoric and all the changes, Saudi Arabia is still not a good place to be a woman. Your life depends on the luck of the draw: if your father or your brother or son is nice, they’ll let you do what you want. You can work, travel and, now, drive. But if they’re not, they can turn your life into a living hell with no repercussions. Even if the guardianship laws are repealed – and such a move is rumored to be in the works – Saudi’s ultra-patriarchal culture will remain. A woman’s word will still be worth less than a man’s. Because of the extraordinary power held by families in Saudi, male relatives will still be able to control ‘their’ women.” [\(The Times UK\)](#)

July 31: Dissent still not Accepted in Saudi, U.N. says, Calls for Activists’ Release

“The United Nations human rights office called on Saudi Arabia on Tuesday to release all peaceful activists, including women held for campaigning against a ban on driving even as it was being lifted. ‘We urge the Government of Saudi Arabia to unconditionally release all human rights defenders and activists who have been detained for their peaceful human rights work, including their decades-long campaigns for the lifting of the driving ban for women,’ U.N. human rights spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani said.” [\(Reuters\)](#)

SYRIA

July 23: Number of Women and Children who Joined ISIS ‘Significantly’ Underestimated

“Experts have warned of the growing threat of women and minors linked to Islamic State, suggesting that the number returning to Britain from Syria and Iraq has been significantly underestimated. According to a new report from King’s College London, a combination of an absence of government data and a changing view within Isis of when women should take up arms means that the danger they pose is likely to be much greater than official figures suggest.” [\(The Guardian\)](#)

July 30: ISIS ‘Seized Women and Children’ in Sweida Attack

“Islamic State (IS) militants are holding more than 30 women and children hostage in south-western Syria, a monitor and local media say. They are thought to have been seized during a wave of deadly IS attacks in Suweida province last week. The Syrian government controls most of the region but IS militants hold a small amount of territory there. Pro-government forces recently launched a campaign to retake remaining rebel- and jihadist-held areas in the south.” [\(BBC News\)](#)

July 31: Mai Skaf: Syrian Actor and Democracy Activist Exiled by the Assad Regime

“Mai Skaf, often anglicised as May Scaff during her career, was one of Syria’s most popular TV and film actresses who became a leading activist and revolutionary against her nation’s leader Bashar al-Assad. She was a Christian in a mainly Muslim country and was outspoken in her attacks on Assad for failing to protect the country’s religious minorities. With her defiant hazel eyes and wild brown but greying hair, fellow protesters described her as ‘the icon of the revolution’. Forced into exile in 2013 by the Assad regime’s threats – she had been detained several times during street protests – she died suddenly in Paris on 23 July aged 49.” [\(The Independent\)](#)

TUNISIA

July 12: will Tunis’ First Female Mayor Advocate for Women’s Rights?

“Between the applause and the reservations, observers believe that the actual test of Abdel Rahim will be on the ground. How she will handle issues of local governance and harmony between her and the municipal council’s members will be decisive in light of the existing sharp political and partisan bickering.” [\(Al Monitor\)](#)

July 26: One Year Ago, Tunisia Passed a Groundbreaking Law to Protect Women. Has it worked?

“In a country where 53 percent of women have experienced violence of some kind – significantly higher than the estimated global rate of 35 percent – the law was a huge win for activists. ‘On paper, I think it’s the best law in the region and probably one of the best in the world,’ says Amna Guellali, senior Tunisia and Algeria researcher at Human Rights Watch. But one year on, while the law has had some positive effects, serious failings in implementation mean it’s not delivering the drastic improvement in protection and prosecution that it promised. Activists are now pressing on to make sure the hard-won legislation makes a real difference to women’s lives.” [\(TIME\)](#)

July 26: Tunisia: Landmark Proposals on Gender Bias, Privacy

“The Commission on Individual Freedoms and Equality, [in its report published on June 12, 2018](#), recommended decriminalizing sodomy and ensuring equality between men and women in inheritance, eliminating ‘morality’ laws, and abolishing the death penalty. ‘This is truly momentous. President Beji Caid Essebsi should seize this opportunity to introduce legislation that would make the human rights advances recommended by his commission the law of the land,’ said Amna Guellali, Tunisia director at Human Rights Watch.” [\(Human Rights Organization\)](#)

TURKEY

July 26: In Turkey, Refugee Child Marriages Drive Adolescent Pregnancies Underground

“Some 475,000 Syrian refugees have sought safe haven in the desert city, about an hour’s drive from the Syrian border. Many are mired in poverty and struggling to rebuild their lives. Some have resorted to marrying off their underage daughters. These girls are at high risk of becoming pregnant early – even before their bodies are ready.” [\(UNFPA\)](#)

OPINION/ANALYSIS

July 16: How Women are transforming the Arab World’s Startup Scene

“It may surprise some to learn that one in three start-ups in the Arab World is founded or led by women. That’s a higher percentage than in Silicon Valley. Women are becoming a force to be reckoned with on the start-up scene across the Middle East. Because the tech industry is still relatively new in the Arab world, there is no legacy of it being a male-dominated field. Many entrepreneurs from the region believe that technology is one of the few spaces where everything is viewed as possible, including breaking gender norms, making it a very attractive industry for women.” [\(World Economic Forum\)](#)



July 17: Meet the Women Driving the Arab World's Digital Revolution

"With more women in tech per capita than anywhere else in the world, the Middle East is the place to be if you want to ride the digital wave. The region's can-do business culture, coupled with the internet's work-anywhere capability, has created the perfect conditions for flourishing female talent. Vogue meets the entrepreneurs, investors, marketers and techies who are driving this phenomenal trend." ([Vogue.UK](#))

July 21: Dancing is Not a Crime

"Iranian security agents arrested [Maedeh] Hojabri in May for posting videos of herself dancing on Instagram, where she has tens of thousands of followers. In response to the Islamic republic's crackdown, countless supporters around the world posted videos of themselves dancing on social media with the hashtag #dancingisnotacrime. Such activism follows a series of acts of civil disobedience against Iran's decades-long restrictions on women's freedom. Recently women have disguised themselves as men to enter sports stadiums and publicly removed their government-mandated head scarves, a risky form of protest that has led to arrests." ([The New York Times](#))

July 23: The Big Gains for Women's Rights in the Middle East, Explained

"Across the Middle East and North Africa, countries have been upgrading women's rights. Since 2011, nearly every country in North Africa has adopted a gender quota, in which parties are required to nominate a minimum percentage of women as candidates for office, to increase women's representation in politics. In Egypt, Tunisia, Iraq, Yemen and Morocco, women can now pass on citizenship to their children, and Lebanon may soon join this list. The region has seen widespread repeal of laws letting rapists escape punishment if they marry their victims. And nine countries adopted laws against domestic violence." ([The Washington Post](#))

July 26: It's Hard Being a Woman in Iraq

"Violence against women is not just about murdering them. These crimes go as far as physical and emotional abuse that takes place over time. Even if police arrest the perpetrator, it will not change much. Many murder cases are claimed as 'honor killings' and then shut for good. In the end, the crime is added to the murderer's profile as a source of pride and honor, not something to feel guilty or ashamed of." ([Fair Observer](#))

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~~~ By May Baaklini ~~~