

MENA Women's News Brief

April 7, 2015 –April 20, 2015

April 14: UN: Sexual Violence a 'Tactic of War'

“On April 13, 2015, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made public a report on conflict-related sexual violence in 19 countries during 2014 that described challenges due to poor monitoring, limited support services, and lack of accountability. The report asserts that conflict-related sexual violence is a core element of the ideology and operation of extremist groups such as Boko Haram and ISIS, and recommends a stronger focus on this threat.” ([Human Rights Watch](#))

Bahrain

April 19: Bahrain bank offers \$100m for women's projects

“Bahrain Development Bank (BDB) has allocated \$100 million to support women's trade activities. Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Women (SCW) Hala Al-Ansari noted the \$ 100 million provided by BDB will be used to finance micro, small and medium-sized enterprises of women seeking to develop their projects and join the entrepreneurship field.” ([Trade Arabia](#))

Egypt

April 16: Female Athletes in Egypt Face Low Pay and Little Support

“Although the wrestlers here are among the best athletes in the country, they deal with low pay, little recognition, and limited opportunities in the sport, because they are women. Egyptian female athletes do not only face the challenges female athletes face in a male-dominated sports industry, but the additional challenges of the country's stringent gender norms.” ([Vice News](#))

April 18: Exposing the Horrors of Sexual Violence Against Refugees in Egypt

“Egypt is today home to 262,333 residents who are divided between 237,117 refugees, and 25,194 asylum seekers, according to the UNHCR latest statistics. Given the grave crises which force refugees out of their homes, one would assume security rests on top of the living conditions they seek. Instead, sexual violence is one of many ways refugees have been greeted in Egypt, filling them up with shame, fear and loss to say the least.” ([Egyptian Streets](#))

April 19: Nour Party to include Christian women on its electoral lists: Nader Bakkar

“Nader Bakkar, the assistant head of media affairs for the Salafist Nour Party, said in a statement on Sunday, April 19 that the party's electoral list will include 120 women, including those who are Christian and Muslim women who wear the Niqab.” ([Ahram Online](#))

April 20: Rare prison sentence given to sexual harasser in Cairo

“A man received a five-year prison sentence Sunday, April 19 for sexually harassing a woman on public transport in Cairo, a rare victory for anti-harassment groups that struggle to take cases through court. The Abdeen Court found the man guilty of ‘indecent’ for harassment on a microbus in an incident dating back to 2013.” ([Daily News Egypt](#))

Iran

April 8: Women Still Banned From Sport Stadiums

“No new regulation, which would permit women to attend sporting events and matches, was ever approved by the Security Council, said the Director of Information and International Affairs at the Ministry of Interior. The announcement, which was covered extensively by the media, came out after a high-ranking official at the Ministry of Sport and Youth, said that the Security Council was considering allowing women and families to attend sport stadiums.” ([Iran Wire](#))

April 12: Iran accepted on UN women's agency board despite US objection

“Despite opposition from the United States, Iran has been accepted as a member of the governing board of the UN Agency for Women. U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power said she was ‘deeply disappointed’ by the result. This is a three-year term, and Iran's membership will commence at the beginning of 2016.” ([Payvand](#))

April 14: Iran to Appoint First Female Ambassador Since Islamic Revolution in 1979 - Reports

“Iran will appoint its first female ambassador abroad since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the semi-official Fars and Mehr news agencies said late on Monday, April 13 citing unspecified reports. The post would go to Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Marzieh Afkham, one of Iran's most high-profile female public figures, although it was not clear where she would be sent, the agencies said.” ([Reuters](#))

April 17: Worsening Conditions for Women in Iran Begin to Draw Attention

“Almost two years after his 2013 election, President Hassan Rouhani and his Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, Shahindokht Molaverdi, spoke up against discrimination against women this week, in the face of steadily deteriorating conditions for women in Iran. ‘The government considers it its duty to take necessary action for women to enjoy and utilize social opportunities,’ said Rouhani on April 12, 2015. ‘The government will strive so that 50 percent of the society does not remain unemployed, isolated, and [Iran’s] second gender,’ he added. ([Payvand](#))

April 20: Iranian women and sport: every obstacle an opportunity

“Earlier this month, deputy sports and youth minister Abdolhamid Ahmad called for a more ‘family-oriented’ atmosphere at stadiums that would allow women to attend most major sporting events. Subsequently, Shahindokht Molavardi, the deputy minister for women’s and family affairs, said the government had ‘confirmed’ it would allow women to attend volleyball matches, but added the plans had not yet been ‘approved.’” ([The Guardian](#))

Iraq

April 14: A Yazidi captive's tale: Sold by ISIS as a sex slave

“For the first week, Hanan (name changed to protect her identity) was held with 50 others, regularly beaten and threatened with torture. The group was then taken to a three story building in Mosul she described as a sex slave warehouse, where hundreds of girls and women were held. ‘They would line about 50 of us up at a time, in rows of 10. The men would come in and describe the kind of girl they wanted and then they would pick and choose as they pleased,’ she recalls.” ([CNN](#))

April 15: Report: ISIS Escapees Describe Systematic Rape

“The extremist group Islamic State (also known as ISIS) has carried out systematic rape and other sexual violence against Yazidi women and girls in northern Iraq. Human Rights Watch conducted research in

the town of Dohuk in January and February 2015, including interviewing 20 women and girls who escaped from ISIS, and reviewing ISIS statements about the subject.” ([Human Rights Watch](#))

April 19: Shelters without walls: women building protective infrastructures against rape

“Women from Iraq, Syria, and other countries are implementing multi-layered prevention strategies in their communities against rape being used as a weapon of war, offering immediate protection and countering stigma. For instance, Yanar Mohammed, director of the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), explained how they have built crucial infrastructure, such as shelters and safe houses, and set up escape routes maintained by networks of women human rights defenders.” ([Open Democracy](#))

Israel

April 17: New Arab MK jockeys for influence on women's issues, budget

“Aida Tuma, one of two Arab women elected to the Israeli Knesset, headed Women Against Violence, an organization dedicated to defending Arab women in Israel, and said that if she can, she would also like to be a member of the committee that works on women’s issues. But her top priority is the finance committee. She told Al-Monitor, “This is the committee that will debate the national budget as well as how the budget is spent. I hope to be able to help improve the status of the Arab population in Israel.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

April 19: Op-Ed: Take marriage away from Israel's rabbinical court (Haaretz Editorial Board)

“The High Court of Justice should impose norms of equality on the rabbinical court, but the problem lies in the granting of authority to the rabbinical courts, whose conduct even the High Court of Justice cannot fundamentally change. A system of marriage and divorce to which such prohibitions and lists apply is not compatible with the concepts of democracy and equality. Therefore, the essential struggle – which is more important than improving the situation in the rabbinical courts – is to separate religion from the state here in all realms, especially this one.” ([Haaretz](#))

Lebanon

April 17: 52 percent of female detainees in Lebanon are tortured: report

“More than half of the women arrested by the Lebanese authorities in 2013 and 2014 were subjected to severe torture, according to a report by the Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH). Male investigators have consistently used physical violence, intimidation and violation of privacy against female detainees after their arrest, said the report.” ([Daily Star](#))

Palestinian Territories

April 13: Divorce in Gaza comes at steep price

“Lebanese-born Samira Jamil, 52, said that the divorce process took a month and a half. She ceded all her financial rights. ‘Although I am fragile by nature, oppression strengthened my character. This is why I filed for divorce by khula before the courts. For the process to be quickly completed, I ceded my deferred dowry and the house's furniture,’ Jamil said. ‘I was ready to give up everything in exchange for divorce.’” ([Al-Monitor](#))

Saudi Arabia

April 15: Indonesia protests at execution of maid in Saudi Arabia

“Indonesia's government has summoned Saudi Arabia's ambassador in Jakarta to protest against the execution of an Indonesian domestic worker. Siti Zainab was beheaded on Tuesday, April 14 in Medina after being convicted of stabbing and beating to death her employer, Noura al-Morobei, in 1999. Human rights groups had also criticised the sentence, asserting that Ms. Zainab had been acting in self-defence and might also have been mentally ill.” ([BBC News](#))

April 17: Saudi Arabia executes second Indonesian maid in one week

“Saudi Arabia has executed a second Indonesian maid despite protests from Jakarta, which is itself facing fierce criticism for its failure to heed calls for clemency for a number of foreigners on death row. The Indonesian government summoned the Saudi ambassador to the foreign ministry on Thursday, April 16 after learning that 37-year-old Karni Bt. Medi Tarsim had been beheaded, without official warning.” ([CNN](#))

Syria

April 10: Mysterious brigade of all-female jihadists demanding equality with men emerges in Syria

“A video has emerged of a seemingly independent, all-female jihadist brigade training with Kalashnikov guns – who insist that a woman's role is equal to a man's. The five-minute film is shot outside the Church of Saint Simeon in northern Syria and shows the ‘camp for women for victory and empowerment’ conducting drills and shooting AK47s.” ([The Independent](#))

April 20: Escaped ISIS wives describe life in the all-female al-Khansaa Brigade who punish women with 40 lashes for wearing wrong clothes

“Two women who were part of ISIS’s powerful all-female police squad in Syria, the al-Khansaa Brigade, and have now fled to Turkey, have spoken of their life under the regime and the punishments they were forced to administer to other women. One 20-year-old woman, known as ‘Doaa’, which is not her real name, told Sky News that her role within the elite police squad was to lash women who tried to escape or wore the wrong clothes, though she now regrets it.” ([The Independent](#))

Every three months, the Middle East Program will release a new edition of the MENA Women Quarterly Report, which covers women’s advances and setbacks in politics, economics, conflict situations, and human rights issues throughout the MENA region. The first issue is available on our website.

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