

MENA Women News Brief

August 16, 2016-August 30, 2016

Bahrain

August 21: Bahraini women restricted from going on Hajj without male guardians

“Bahrain’s Ministry of Justice has issued new regulations deemed discriminatory against Bahraini women, which prevent them from going on Hajj without a male guardian if they are below 45 years’ old. The Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) is alarmed by this new regulation that is a stark violation of women’s rights.” ([AhlulBayt News Agency](#))

Egypt

August 17: Egypt Suspends 8 Female TV Anchors, Saying They Are Overweight

“Most Egyptian journalists have had to watch their tongues and tone down their reporting over the past three years to keep their jobs under a military-dominated government. Now, the state is ordering some women working as television anchors to practice a similar restraint with their weight.” ([The New York Times](#))

August 20: Egypt’s First Woman Marine Engineer Breaks into a ‘Men-Only Industry’

“This year, Ingy Abdekarim, 24, became the first woman marine engineer to graduate from the Arab Academy of Science and Technology (AAST) in Egypt. ‘The idea of a girl in this field freaked many people out and they started doubting my abilities,’ Abdelkarim tells Egyptian Streets, as she recalls how she worked her way into what has been a male dominated industry for quite some time.” ([Egyptian Streets](#))

August 23: Can new ‘women’s government’ advance gender equality in Egypt? (Op-Ed by Mohamed Saied)

“In a step aimed at promoting the role of women in Egyptian society, a ‘parallel’ women’s government, the first of its kind, was announced in mid-July, dubbed the Egyptian Women’s Government. A statement issued just before the official launch said that the new Cabinet includes only female independent ministers and will work as a research center to serve Egyptian society and support women’s intellectual paths of all stripes.” ([Al Monitor](#))

August 28: When Egypt Goes to the Beach (Op-Ed by Mona Eltahwy)

“On the beaches of my childhood, bikinis now are unheard-of. On the beaches in Gouna I’ve been to, burkinis are unheard-of. Yet here, in Sahel, we all had a place. Egypt with all its contradictions and incongruities was embodied there on the beach, sitting shoulder to shoulder next to the soothing aquamarine waters of the Mediterranean.” ([The New York Times](#))

August 29: Female genital mutilation: Egypt to toughen penalties

“Egyptian authorities are to increase the penalty for those who force women into genital mutilation (FGM). The statutory prison term recommended for offenders had ranged from between three months and three years. The cabinet has approved plans to impose jail terms of between five and seven years, with harsher sentences if the procedure leads to death or deformity. FGM has been illegal in Egypt since 2008 but it remains widespread.” ([BBC](#))

Iran

August 16: First all-women car rally to be held in Iran

“In addition to evaluating women’s driving skill, the rally aims at visiting tourist sites of Iran and empowering women’s driving ability, the report said. All Iranian women holding driving license along with a map reader are allowed to participate in the event.” ([Tehran Times](#))

August 20: Teenager Alizadeh wins first women’s medal for Iran

“Kimia Alizadeh won the first ever Olympic medal by an Iranian woman after claiming taekwondo bronze in Rio.” ([Your Middle East](#))

August 22: Rural women play important but hidden role in economy: VP

“Unfortunately, the role of rural women is not appreciated and their hidden role is ignored in the society, ISNA quoted Iranian Vice President of Women and Family Affairs, Shahindokht Molaverdi, as saying on Friday, August 19. ‘This is an injustice toward rural women,’ she stressed. Speaking at the closing ceremony of cultural festival of rural girls which was held in Zibakenar rural area, Gilan province, Molaverdi put the emphasis on the role and position of rural girls in different fields.” ([Tehran Times](#))

August 29: The Islamic Republic’s War on Women (Op-Ed by Ziba Mir-Hosseini)

“The Iranian government’s crackdown on feminists, one of the Islamic Republic’s periodic intimidation campaigns against women’s rights activists, is still underway. But the present iteration isn’t just a push-and-pull struggle between the government and civil society, or between the censors and the country’s most prominent women’s magazine — it’s a proxy battle between the president and the country’s hard-liners.” ([Foreign Policy](#))

Iraq

August 18: When Women Fight ISIS (Op-Ed by Meredith Tax)

“Many of these guerrillas were women, for a basic principle of the decades-long Kurdish liberation movement is that women cannot wait for others to defend them, but must themselves fight to be free. Indeed, some of these women say that they fight for other women, because they know what horrors await those captured by the Islamic State.” ([The New York Times](#))

August 19: The horrors of a Yazidi woman kidnapped by ISIS (Op-Ed by Mohammad Ali Salih)

“When Islamic State fighters swept into the Yazidi village of Kocho in Iraq in the summer of 2014, teenager Farida Khalaf was kidnapped along with her sister and about 80 other Yazidi girls. Her father and brother and other Yazidi men were defiant but overwhelmed by the onslaught, and were shot to death outside the village.” ([The Washington Post](#))

August 22: U.N. report finds nearly 2,000 Yazidi women still enduring slavery at hands of ISIS

“ISIS still holds nearly 2,000 Iraqi women as slaves, nearly all of them Yazidis, according to a new United Nations report. Almost two years after ISIS first took over the northern Iraqi district of Sinjar, the 300,000 people who live there, mostly Yazidis, remain displaced.” ([The New York Times](#))

August 25: ISIS Provokes a Backlash Against the Veil

“In some areas Iraqis have become downright suspicious of anyone wearing the niqab, whether justified or not. Many locals suspect that the full-face covering is now used by immoral women who do not want to be identified and there are also plenty of stories of fugitive males, often from ISIS, who have disguised themselves as female, in a niqab, in order to escape justice.” ([The Daily Beast](#))

Israel

August 22: ‘Women of the Wall’ step up activists ahead of High Holidays

“The ‘Women of the Wall’ organization is planning a shofar-blowing seminar, free of charge, next week in Jerusalem. Women of the Wall works to break down religious standards in the public practice of Judaism in Israel, particularly at the Western Wall.” ([Arutz Sheva Israel National News](#))

August 28: Israel Joins Bikini Fray, Ordering Concert Singer to Cover Up

“Even as France has started an international debate about whether some women cover up too much on the beach, Israel has gone the other way, with fresh concerns about whether some cover up too little. The Israeli Ministry of Culture and Sport said on Sunday, August 28 that it would insist on modest dress by performers at government-sponsored musical events after a singer said she was forced to leave the stage for wearing a bikini top at a beachside concert near here last week.” ([The New York Times](#))

Jordan

August 23: Some 258 women running for seats in upcoming Jordan elections

“Some 258 female candidates are running in the upcoming elections, up from 215 in the 2013 polls, Sisterhood Is Global Institute (SIGI) Executive Director Asma Khader said on Monday, August 22. Speaking at a press conference, Khader, a former minister, said the increase in the number of women running for office was due to the 2015 Elections Law and changes to electoral districts.” ([Al Bawaba](#))

Lebanon

August 16: Women rally to demand justice for violence victims

“Activists, women and human rights groups Tuesday, August 16 staged a brief protest outside Beirut's Justice Palace in Adlieh to demand an appeal against the sentence given to a man who beat his wife, Manal Assi, to death.” ([The Daily Star](#))

Libya

August 18: Special Report- Enslaved in Libya: One woman’s extraordinary escape from Islamic State

“This story is based on interviews with Ruta Fisehaye, eight other women enslaved by Islamic State, and five men kidnapped by the group. Reuters spoke to the refugees in three European countries over four months. Two women agreed to speak on the record, risking the stigma that besets survivors of sexual violence.” ([Reuters](#))

Saudi Arabia

August 22: Rethinking women’s role in Saudi diplomacy with UK (Op-Ed by Najah Al-Osaimi)

“The current discourse on the role of soft power in international relations draws attention to the crucial role relationships play between education exchanges, and how they influence foreign populations’ perceptions. Over the last decade, the number of Saudi students coming to study in the UK has reached 100,000, as bilateral relations continue to be spurred by significant military and trade partnerships.” ([Al Arabiya](#))

August 24: How Saudi women are planning to take charge of the local arts scene

“A new program has been launched by the British Council to help develop contemporary art curators in Saudi Arabia, with six Saudi female participants set to take part in the six-month Contemporary Collective program starting this month. They will acquire curatorial and practical management skills, such as planning events and reaching diverse audiences.” ([Al Arabiya](#))

August 25: Saudi women at Olympics: Winners without medals

“No medals were won at the Rio Olympics by either men or women in the Saudi team made up of 13 athletes. For Saudi Arabia, it was the second time for women to participate since the last Olympic Games in London in 2012. With no organized sports programs for women and underdeveloped training facilities in certain sports even for men, there is prospect for change in sports and athletics in the Kingdom.” ([Al Bawaba](#))

Syria

August 23: Women in Syria’s Daraya urge international community to halt Assad’s siege

“Middle East Eye published a passionate plea on Monday from 42 women living in and out of the besieged Syrian city of Daraya, which urged the international community to intervene and halt Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s use of napalm on the city.” ([Middle East Eye](#))

August 25: Syrian women in refugee camps informed of their rights

“Turkey, host to the world’s largest Syrian refugee population, which swelled after a civil war broke out in the country five years ago, is looking to improve the lives of the most vulnerable members of the refugee community - women. Authorities said Turkish staff supervising the 26 camps concentrated near Turkey’s lengthy border with Syria were trained on the international protection of rights, and forced and underage marriages to educate the women in camps on the issues during a project sponsored by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).” ([Daily Sabah](#))

Tunisia

August 29: Women’s rights, a job unfinished in Tunisia (Op-Ed by Kamel Labidi)

“Tunisia’s decision, 60 years ago this month, to grant women unparalleled rights is at the heart of this small country’s leading role in ending despotism and struggling to build democratic institutions since 2011, in an increasingly chaotic and dangerous region.” ([The Daily Star](#))

Turkey

August 21: Hande Kader: Outcry in Turkey over transgender woman’s murder

“The murder of Hande Kader, a transgender woman, has caused an outcry in Turkey’s biggest city Istanbul. Turkey remains conservative on LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) issues, but on Sunday, August 21 activists will stage a rare protest in Istanbul, writes Rengin Arslan of BBC Turkish.” ([BBC](#))

August 28: Turkey allows policewomen to wear headscarves

“Turkey has for the first time allowed policewomen to wear headscarves while on duty as part of their uniform. Women serving in the police force ‘will be able to cover their heads’ under their caps or berets so long as the headscarf is ‘the same colour as the uniform and without pattern’, said the ruling published in the government’s Official Gazette on Saturday, August 27.” ([Al Jazeera](#))

United Arab Emirates

August 20: The fatwa hotline: ‘We have heard everything’ (Op-Ed by Hamida Ghafour)

“We are in the small, cramped office of the fatwa hotline on the eighth floor of the General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowments in Abu Dhabi, better known by its Arabic acronym, the Awqaf. Abu Dhabi’s dial-a-fatwa hotline is run from a nondescript government building next to a supermarket along a busy stretch of road that leads to the pale turquoise waters of the Persian Gulf. Abu Dhabi’s dial-a-fatwa hotline is run from a nondescript government building next to a supermarket along a busy stretch of road that leads to the pale turquoise waters of the Persian Gulf.” ([The Guardian](#))

August 22: The Emirati striving to empower women in the workplace

“Shamsa Saleh is at the forefront of advancing the lives and championing the rights of UAE women. As chief executive of Dubai Women Establishment, it is her job to shape an environment where women have the opportunities and support they need to build businesses and careers.” ([The National](#))

August 28: Gender equality in energy sector stressed

“Speaking on the occasion of Emirati Women’s Day (Sunday, August 28), female achievers said that while great strides have been made in promoting gender diversity, the oil and gas industry is still struggling with exceptionally low female-to-male ratios when compared to other fields of work.” ([Gulf Digital News](#))

Yemen

August 16: As crisis escalates in Yemen, pregnant women need essential care

“Civilian fatalities are mounting in Yemen, with some of the deadliest episodes of violence taking place in the last two months. UNFPA estimates over 400,000 pregnant women are caught in the conflict, requiring essential and sometimes urgent health services.” ([The United Nations Population Fund](#))

General

August 19: What Happens After Countries Finally Start Sending Women to the Olympics

“A hundred and twelve years after the IOC first allowed women to compete, London marked the first time that all 206 National Olympic Committees sent female athletes to the Games; the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Brunei Darussalam and Qatar were the final holdouts. To many observers, Sarah Attar and her fellow athletes' participation was a sign of progress for three countries that have not traditionally provided a way for women in sports, either because it was not a priority or because, as in Saudi Arabia, it was outright discouraged.” ([VICE](#))

August 22: The Multifaceted ‘Burkini’ Debate

“In Turkey, traditional Muslim women have long argued that wearing what they want on their heads is a fundamental human right. Feminists and secularists counter that the head scarf is a symbol of women’s subjection to men, and of Mr. Erdogan’s project to restore the country’s Islamic identity. These same arguments are heard elsewhere. In Morocco, private pools and beaches have banned the burkini for several years, mostly in the name of hygiene.” ([The New York Times](#))

By Elena Scott-Kakures, Middle East Program

The Middle East Program would like to thank Elena Scott-Kakures for compiling the MENA Women News Brief throughout the past four months. We wish her the best in her future endeavors.

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