MENA Women News Brief

December 1, 2015-December 15, 2015

Read what some of the Middle East Program's fellows have been writing about women:

December 7: Why is the Idea of Female Western Jihadists a Mystery?
by Fatima Sadiqi (Viewpoints)
December 8: Saudi Women Go to the Polls—Finally
by David B. Ottaway (Viewpoints)
December 13: Saudi Women Made History–But Still Have a Long Way to Go
by Haleh Esfandiari (Wall Street Journal Think Tank Blog)

Algeria

December 11: Algeria: Council of Nation Passes Law On Women Protection Procedures
"Members of the Council of the Nation (Upper House) adopted Thursday, December 10 unanimously the legislation amending and supplementing the Criminal Code containing new procedures inherent to the protection of women against all forms of violence. The novelties include an article on the protection of the wife against assault and battery, causing a state of disability or causing amputation, limb loss, permanent disability or death of the victim, in addition to sanctions against prejudice." (All Africa)

Egypt

December 8: LE50,000 fee on foreigners who marry Egyptian women 'if age difference exceeds 25 years': Justice ministry
"Egypt's justice minister Ahmed El-Zend issued on Tuesday, December 8 a decree that obliges foreigners intending to marry Egyptian women to present investment certificates worth LE50,000 (about $6,385) in the wife's bank account if the age difference between the two 'exceeds 25 years.'" (Ahram Online)

December 11: Egyptian Doctor Found Guilty Of Female Genital Mutilation Isn't In Jail
"In January, Dr. Raslan Fadl was convicted after one of his patients, a young girl called Soheir al Batea, died under his care. But Fadl hasn't served a day behind bars. Soheir was 13 years old when her parents took her to Fadl to undergo a procedure that's common for most girls here in the Nile Delta — genital cutting." (NPR)

December 12: Egypt: NCW Launches Program to Train Women MPs
"The National Council for Women (NCW) launches on Saturday, December 12 an intense program to train the women parliamentarians who won in the second stage of the parliamentary elections. The program, entitled 'Egypt's women MPs 2015... the second stage of the House of Representative elections,' will be held from 12-15 December." (All Africa)

Iran

December 9: Set To Take Over Tech: 70 percent of Iran's Science and Engineering Students Are Women

"70 percent of Iran's science and engineering students are women, and in a small, but promising community of startups, they're being encouraged to play an even bigger role. For years, women in Iran have owned and managed businesses, many of them in male dominant industries like oil and gas, construction, mining, and now tech. And now, with such a high number graduating with degrees in science and engineering, there's a push to get women more involved in Iran's blossoming startup scene." (Forbes)

Iraq

December 4: The Forgotten Women and Children of Iraq (Op-Ed by Caitlin Vito)

"She found out about the devastating consequences for her and her daughter only after her husband's death. As with many Iraqi couples, she and her husband had been married by a religious cleric and their marriage had never been registered with the Iraqi civil authorities. With no official proof of marriage, both mother and daughter were left ineligible for basic state assistance. Their story is not unique." (Thomson Reuters Foundation)

December 6: How a Woman Joins ISIS

"For ISIS, women are a valuable commodity. Judging by the stories that have emerged in the 14 months after the Yazidis fled Mount Sinjar, we know how the organization systematically exploits women, who can be bought, sold, and traded with official sanction. ISIS likewise abuses the women they pretend to defend—Sunni women who have emigrated to their self-proclaimed caliphate." (The Daily Beast)

Israel

December 2: 30,000 Israeli Pregnant Women Can't Afford Proper Nutrition

"Every year, 30,000 women living in poverty become pregnant. In addition to the women being at high risk, their fetuses will also usually suffer from a lack of adequate nutrition and medical care. Even though this is not a marginal phenomenon, and given the fact that sustaining a normal pregnancy costs money, there is no program in Israel to aid this population, as a separate group with unique needs." (Haaretz)

December 11: Supreme Court Censures Haredi Radio Station Over Women-free Broadcasts

"The Supreme Court approved a class action suit Thursday, December 10 against an ultra-Orthodox radio station for its alleged exclusion of women from the air. The court rejected an appeal by the station, Kol Barama, against the suit, which is being brought by the Orthodox women's organization Kolech, that the station does not allow women to appear on the air." (Haaretz)

Jordan

December 12: Sophisticated IS Recruitment Methods Lured Jordanian Woman

"A Jordanian woman who came close to joining the Islamic State group described a sophisticated 14-month recruitment process by the extremists that she said landed her in a secret IS compound in Turkey with dozens of other women. The 25-year-old was eventually persuaded by Jordanian lawmaker Mazen Dalaeen—who earlier this year failed to extract his own son from the grip of IS recruiters—to return to her family." (Associated Press)

Lebanon

December 1: ISIS chief's ex-wife released in Lebanon-al Nusra prisoner swap

"The Lebanese government on Tuesday, December 1 released the former wife of ISIS chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as part of a prisoner swap, a Lebanese security official said. The woman, Saja al-Dulaimi, was among a group of Islamists that the Lebanese government exchanged for Lebanese soldiers held captive by al Qaeda-affiliated al Nusra Front, the security official said." (CNN)

Morocco

December 9: Fatema Mernissi, a Founder of Islamic Feminism, Dies at 75

"Fatema Mernissi, a Moroccan sociologist who was one of the founders of Islamic feminism, whose work included studies of the sexual politics of Islamic Scripture and a memoir of her childhood in a domestic harem, died on Nov. 30 in Rabat. She was 75." (The New York Times)

Palestinian Territories

December 1: Young Palestinian Women Join the West Bank Turmoil

"Fifteen young women have stabbed, tried to stab or, the Israeli authorities say, intended to stab Israeli soldiers or civilians in the West Bank and Jerusalem since an uprising began in October. Where previous outbursts of Palestinian violence predominantly involved men and boys, women and girls have accounted for about 20 percent of all Palestinian attackers in the last two months" (The New York Times)

Saudi Arabia

December 2: Saudi Arabian divorced women and widows to get greater legal powers

"Saudi Arabia is to allow divorced women and widows to manage family affairs without approval from a man or a court order in a major step towards lifting some of the legal powers men hold over female relatives. The Al Riyadh newspaper reported that the interior ministry would issue family identity cards not only to men, but also to divorcees and widows, granting them powers that will include accessing records, registering children for schools and authorising medical procedures." (The Guardian)

December 10: For Young Saudi Women, Video Games Offer Self-Expression

"In a Riyadh hotel ballroom, virtual reality meets real life at GCON, an annual convention for young women who love video games and grew up playing them with their siblings. GCON was born after female gamers were barred from an all-male gaming convention in 2011. GCON co-founders Tasneem Salim and Felwa al-Swailem persuaded big gaming brands to back an all-female convention by convincing them there was a huge market among Saudi females." (NPR)

December 9: Saudi officials once jailed this woman for driving. But she found her way back on the ballot.

"She was jailed for 10 weeks for driving. But Saudi officials will let her run. In a surprise reversal Wednesday, Saudi Arabia lifted its election block on activist-slash-candidate Loujain Hathloul, who gained fame last year by live-streaming her defiance of the kingdom's ban driving for women." (Washington Post)

December 14: Saudi voters elect 20 women candidates for the first time
"Saudi voters elected 20 women for local government seats, according to results released to The Associated Press on Sunday, December 13 a day after women voted and ran in elections for the first time in the country's history." (Al Arabiya)

December 14: Social Media Lifts Saudi Women in Vote
"After Lama al-Sulaiman became one of Saudi Arabia's first elected female politicians over the weekend, she celebrated her landmark victory through her Twitter account. She expressed thanks to her supporters and said she hopes to meet their expectations. As with many other candidates who had to campaign under restrictive rules in this absolutist monarchy, Ms. al-Sulaiman bet heavily on social media to promote her political program and to hear from voters." (Wall Street Journal)

Syria

December 2: The refugee kitchen offering Syrian women sanctuary in Sudan
"With its ailing economy and ongoing conflict, Sudan is not the obvious place to seek sanctuary. But Umm Mohammed is one of a growing number of Syrians who have found shelter here after escaping the raging civil war at home. While the majority fleeing Syria still aim for Europe, the UN says that a shared language and similarities in culture has made the east African country an increasingly popular alternative." (The Guardian)

December 7: The women of ISIL
"Reactions to the (mis)reported claim that Hasna Aït Boulahcen—who was killed in a police raid in Saint Denis a few days after the Paris attacks that killed 130—was France's first female suicide bomber prompted fierce discussion about the role women play in ISIL. Now Sally Jones—a mother of two and widow of a British ISIL fighter—has announced her intention to blow herself up in Syria. Has ISIL joined the long list of jihadi groups using female suicide bombers?" (Politico)

December 8: Why some Syrian refugees see marriage as the only option
"According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the country is home to about 160,000 Syrian refugees, and there are offices set up to traffic in Syrian female refugees and arrange for customary marriages between Syrian women and Egyptian men in exchange for a fee. Customary marriage—known as nikah 'urfi—is a type of marriage where the contract is not registered with the state and no witnesses are required." (Al-Monitor)

December 8: Three Brave Women Share What It's Really Like Inside Syria Right Now
"At first glance, Zein, Rafia (a pseudonym) and Ahed look like any other twentysomething women. But each had already experienced far more than most people twice their age have: Zein and Ahed, while working as paramedics in a makeshift field hospital; Rafia, by being one of the few independent journalists still writing about both Bashar al-Assad and ISIS." (Refinery29)

December 7: Sara's story: Loved and then killed in ISIL's capital
"A few months before she died, Sara was courted by a member of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group. Sara, who lived with her husband and three children in ISIL's de facto capital of Raqqa, in Syria, rejected the advances of Abu al-Muthna al-Iraqi, an ISIL member from Iraq. Her decision set off a chain of events that would ultimately lead to her death." (AlJazeera)

Tunisia

December 4: Hundreds of Tunisian women join ISIS in Syria: minister

"Around 700 Tunisian women have traveled to Syria to join extremist groups, Minister for Women Samira Merai told parliament Friday, December 4. Some 5,000 people from Tunisia, which is battling an Islamist insurgency at home, are thought to have joined the ranks of the Islamic State group (ISIS), and other groups, in Syria, Iraq and Libya." (Daily Star)

Turkey

December 3: Three jailed for murdering young woman in case that shocked Turkey

"Three men convicted of murdering a young Turkish woman after she resisted an attempt to rape her on a minibus were sentenced to life imprisonment on Thursday, with no chance of parole. The murder of 20-year-old Ozgecan Aslan last February shocked Turkey, drawing public protests and prompting President Tayyip Erdogan to describe violence against women as the nation's 'bleeding wound.'" (Reuters)

December 9: UN delegates vow to pressure Turkish gov't for transparency in murders of women

"Officials from the United Nations have vowed to continue pressuring the Turkish government to provide statistics regarding the relentlessly high number of women murdered at the hands of men, an issue about which the government has not provided statistics since 2009." (Today's Zaman)

United Arab Emirates

December 11: UAE women more financially literate than men, bucking global trend

"Women in the UAE are more financially literate than men, according to a new survey which said it one of just a few countries in the world where this is true. The Standard & Poor's Ratings Services Global Financial Literacy Survey showed that in almost every country apart from the UAE, there is a material gap between men and women. Worldwide, there is a five-point gender gap, with 35 percent of men being financially literate compared with 30 percent of women, however in the UAE, women's financial literacy averages 4 percentage points higher than men's." (Arabian Business)

General

December 5: Vital steps to eradicate violence against women (Op-Ed by Yara al-Wazir)

"Women in the Middle East and North Africa are more likely to experience violence by an intimate partner than any of their international counterparts, according to the World Health Organisation. What is disappointing is that 20 years after the U.N. General Assembly declared a framework to end violence against women, it is still forecasted that 70 percent of women will experience some form of violence in their lifetime. And this region has a lot of work to do in ending the problem." (Al-Arabiya)

December 12: Timeline of women's right to vote around the world

"From the late 19th to the early 21st century, the right to vote has been a long struggle for women. Saudis join the rest of the world on Saturday, December 12, leaving only Brunei, where neither men nor women hold this fundamental right." (Gulf News)

By Julia Craig Romano

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