

MENA Women News Brief

December 15, 2015-January 5, 2016

Egypt

December 16: Female members aim to form parliamentary bloc

“Several newly elected female members of parliament are planning to form a coalition for women inside the parliament, stressing that the women’s bloc aims to support the women’s experience in the parliament. Seventy-three women managed to secure parliamentary seats in the elections held over the past two months.” ([Daily News Egypt](#))

December 19: Marital rape: Women between fear of reporting and weak legislation

“Noura Mohamed, the manager of a program aiming to combat violence against women at the Centre of Egyptian Women’s Legal Assistance (CEWLA), recounted the story of a woman who was raped by a husband, who took her income and defamed her, spreading rumors about her ‘questionable morality.’ Mohamed said that in many cases as these, the main role of the program to combat violence against women is to provide social, psychological, legal, and financial support to women who suffer from physical abuse.” ([Daily News Egypt](#))

December 21: Women-only buses introduced in Egypt for first time

“Egypt has for the first time introduced women-only buses in the Nile Delta city of Damanshah, with officials saying the move is not to combat sexual harassment as assumed by many. ‘The governorate has received complaints from women in the past weeks that they were unable to use public transportation, especially during rush hours,’ says El-Sayed, explaining that women were often physically unable to reach the bus doors due to men pushing their way onto the buses.” ([Ahram Online](#))

December 24: 26-year-old female MP has big plans for Egypt’s new parliament

“Following her victory in the recent Egyptian parliamentary elections, Sarah Saleh, 26, became the youngest parliament member in the history of the South Sinai governorate. In an interview with Al-Monitor, she noted that while her age was the biggest obstacle she faced, she managed to transform it into one of the driving forces of her victory.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

December 25: Egypt launches anti-female genital mutilation plan

“Egypt has launched a five-year plan to reduce girls’ circumcision, better known as female genital mutilation (FGM). The five-year nationwide plan seeks to curb the centuries-old practice through creating a ‘propitious socio-political and cultural atmosphere’ against it, the Health Ministry said on Friday, December 25.” ([Gulf News](#))

December 28: Egypt: Women's Achievements in 2015 - Presiding Judges and Elected Parliamentarians

“The year 2015 witnessed a number of achievements for women, the highlight of which was the swearing-in of new female judges and the unprecedented presence of female parliamentarians in the upcoming parliament with 73 elected members.” ([All Africa](#))

December 28: Egyptian Women Face Violence, Media Abuse and Exclusion From Senior Positions in 2015

“Egyptian women suffered losses on several fronts in 2015, which was particularly evident in the continuation of violence and sexual harassment, as well as the inequality faced with regards to assuming senior administrative positions and getting appointed to the state's legal institutions.” ([All Africa](#))

December 28: Will Egypt's schools break sex education taboo?

“On the first day of the UN Women's annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence campaign that began Nov. 25, a school-based sex education effort titled ‘Sexual education: a need, not a luxury’ was launched to serve as an introduction to address violence against women in particular, in light of the misconceptions in Egyptian society where sex education is equated with teaching young men to have sex.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

Iran

December 15: Iran seizes thousands of cars for women's veil offences

“Iran has impounded tens of thousands of cars since March because women inside the vehicles had not properly covered their hair with a headscarf, Tehran's traffic police said Tuesday, December 15. ‘Over the past eight months, more than 40,000 cases of bad hijab have been dealt with,’ said Brigadier General Teymour Hosseini, quoted by ISNA news agency.” ([AFP via Yahoo](#))

December 19: Registration Starts for Iran Parliamentary Election

“Iran started registering candidates on Saturday, December 19 for parliamentary elections due to take place in February and set to be a crucial vote that will shape Iran's politics for years to come. The registration process will last a week. Mohammad Reza Aref, a former reformist vice president, said he hoped that women would win more parliamentary seats this year, adding that ‘a void is felt for the presence of female lawmakers.’ There are currently nine women in Iran's parliament.” ([Associated Press via ABC News](#))

December 29: How Many Women Will Iran Allow to Run for Office? (Op-ed by Haleh Esfandiari)

“An unusually large number of women have organized and registered to run in Iran's February elections. The record turnout among would-be candidates for parliament and the Assembly of Experts, a body that selects the Islamic Republic's supreme leader, is causing unease among the conservative clerical hierarchy. The question for now is whether a significant number of women will be allowed to compete.” ([Wall Street Journal Think Tank Blog](#))

January 1: Highest Ranked Woman in Iran's Government to Sue Extremist Publication

“The weekly Ya Lesarat, the mouthpiece of the shadowy, semi-official vigilante group Ansar-e Hezbollah, has a long history of defaming and inciting violence against women with whom it has ideological differences. This time it chose the Rouhani administration's Vice President Shahindokht Molaverdi as its target. On December 23, 2015 it published a fierce attack on Molaverdi, describing her as ‘worse than the most famous prostitute in the world.’ Four days later, Molaverdi posted a public note on her Facebook page criticizing the publication and promising legal action against it.” ([Payvand](#))

January 4: War of Words: A woman's battle to end stoning and juvenile execution in Iran

“In the summer of 2004, a news item from the town of Neka, in Mazandaran, brought journalist Asieh Amini up short. A sixteen-year-old girl named Atefeh Sahaaleh had been executed for ‘acts

incompatible with chastity.’ Official government sources gave Sahaaleh’s age as twenty-two. Amini was struck by the discrepancy, and disturbed that a young girl had been hanged at all. She went to Neka to find out more.” ([New Yorker](#))

Iraq

December 20: A Yazidi Woman Who Escaped ISIS Slavery Tells Her Story

“Twenty-one-year-old Nadia Murad Basee Taha is in New York City to testify in front of the UN Security Council about the plight of the Yazidi ethnic and religious minority under ISIS and to ask the U.N. Security Council to rescue the enslaved Yezidis and help them liberate their land from the militants. She’s also here to tell her story, with the help of Yazda, a U.S.-based nonprofit dedicated to supporting survivors of Yazidi genocide and women who have escaped from ISIS.” ([TIME](#))

December 27: Report: Hundreds of women executed in Mosul, sentenced by Sharia court

“A report by the Nineveh police department on Islamic State (ISIS) crimes in Mosul says that up to 837 women have been executed by the extremist group since its takeover of Mosul. Commander of the Nineveh police Zanuon al-Sabawi, said at a press conference that the women have been executed in various forms. According to al-Sabawi, most of the women victims were former candidates to the Iraqi parliament, provincial council members, and public employees.” ([Rudaw](#))

December 29: Islamic State ruling aims to settle who can have sex with female slaves

Islamic State theologians have issued an extremely detailed ruling on when ‘owners’ of women enslaved by the extremist group can have sex with them, in an apparent bid to curb what they called violations in the treatment of captured females. ([Reuters](#))

Israel

December 29: Netanyahu backs both status quo and change for women at Western Wall

“Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged Tuesday, December 29 to find a solution for women wishing to read from the Torah at the Western Wall, while upholding the status quo that bans them from doing so, a statement from his office said.” ([The Times of Israel](#))

December 29: Israeli Women’s Groups Decry Lenient Rape Sentence

“A Tel Aviv court’s decision Monday, December 28 to sentence a convicted rapist to community service rather than jail has sparked a storm of protest among rape victims’ groups and a Facebook page calling for the resignation of one of the judges. Galia Woloch, chairwoman of the women's group Naamat, said the lenient verdict was ‘a very serious message that will deter women from filing police complaints.’” ([Haaretz](#))

Jordan

December 18: Artist paints scathing picture of Jordan rape law

“Artist Rand Abdelnur’s first solo exhibition titled ‘Woman II: Adorned with Jasmine’ addresses Article 308 of the Jordanian penal code, a controversial article still at the core of socio-political debate in Jordan. The passage states: ‘If a valid contract of marriage is made between the perpetrator (of any of the offenses mentioned in this section) and the victim, the prosecution is suspended. If judgment was already passed, the implementation of the punishment upon the sentenced person is suspended.’” ([Al-Monitor](#))

Qatar

December 31: Qatar calls for more female taxi drivers

“Qatar’s Central Municipal Council (CMC) has called for more female taxi drivers to meet high demand, Doha News reported. The council has urged state-run transportation company, Mowasalat, to expand a female taxi driver service to facilitate a safe and comfortable way for women to get around the country. According to CMC member, Nasser Ibrahim Mohamed Issa Al Mohannadi, the move would help women feel more secure, avoid bullying, and evade harassment.” ([Arabian Business](#))

Saudi Arabia

December 18: Saudi’s first women councilors get media exposure

“Since their historic election last week, some of Saudi Arabia's first-ever female politicians have been propelled from near-anonymity into the glare of the media spotlight. Several of the 20 new female councilors have already appeared on TV, and in magazines, newspapers and the online press, and are quickly having to adjust to the unprecedented attention.” ([BBC News](#))

December 22: After Historic Elections In Saudi Arabia, What's The Future For Women?

“In municipal council races in Saudi Arabia a week ago, 21 female candidates were elected to office. In the country's third-ever elections, the monarchy gave women the right to vote, as well as to seek election to office. NPR's Rachel Martin and Marisa Peñaloza traveled to Saudi Arabia ahead of the election to find out how women were reacting to their new rights and how they've been living.” ([NPR](#))

December 23: Women can work from home from next month

“The Labor Ministry will officially launch its ‘work from a distance program’ for women next month in seven cities, local daily al-Madina reported Tuesday, December 22 quoting an official source at the ministry. The source said under the program, about 200,000 Saudi women are expected to be employed by the private sector during the coming four years.” ([Saudi Gazette](#))

December 23: Saudi Arabia 'spares' Sri Lankan maid in adultery case

“The life of a Sri Lankan maid due to be stoned to death in Saudi Arabia for adultery has been spared, Sri Lanka's foreign ministry says. She will instead be imprisoned, Sri Lankan Deputy Foreign Minister Dr Harsha de Silva announced. An appeal by Sri Lanka was considered by Saudi Arabia and the execution order was withdrawn, he said.” ([BBC News](#))

December 25: Female entrepreneurs find increased success in KSA

“An increasing number of women in Saudi Arabia have begun to achieve tremendous success in the entrepreneurial field, tackling big businesses and male-dominated industries to make their unique mark on the economy.” ([Arab News](#))

December 29: Saudi women banned from flight attendant jobs

“Saudi Arabia’s national airline, Saudi Arabian Airlines (Saudia), will not employ Saudi women as air hostesses on its flights, the firm told Saudi Gazette. Abdul Rahman Al-Fahd, a spokesman of the national carrier, gave no explanation for the decision. However, he said Saudi women could work in the female customer service sections in the airline’s reservation offices, commercial or financial sector, or IT departments.” ([Arabian Business](#))

December 29: 23 Saudi women on trial over terrorism charges

“Twenty-three Saudi women accused of association with Al-Qaeda and Daesh (so-called IS) are currently being tried in the Kingdom. Some of them have been convicted and jailed. According to official sources, the Special Criminal Court began hearing the cases of these female extremists two years ago.” ([Saudi Gazette](#))

January 1: Saudi Women Seek More Good Jobs

“The leaders of the Arab world’s largest economy (Saudi Arabia) want to build a robust industrial base to help diversify away from oil revenues, which cover around 90 percent of the state budget and have been declining as prices fall. Women are playing an unexpected role in that transition, challenging conventional labor relations in the staunchly conservative Saudi kingdom.” ([Wall Street Journal](#))

Syria

December 18: John Kerry, where are women’s voices in the Syria peace talks? (Op-ed by Lisa Davis)

“Today, we face the prospect of a Middle East peace conference with disappointment at its delay and frustration that, yet again, negotiators embrace a framework that ignores the origins of the revolution and gives credence only to men with guns. Watching the spectacle of governments maneuvering for a place at the negotiating table, one has to ask: where are the women who started this revolution?” ([Open Democracy](#))

December 21: Syrian women struggle to survive in exile

“According to the UN refugee agency UNHCR, nearly one in four women from Syria have been forced to provide for their households following the death or disappearance of their husbands. And while some have persevered, most have suffered from sexual abuse, exploitation and depression.” ([Deutsche Welle](#))

December 23: What are the Kurdish Women’s Units fighting for in Syria?

“Earlier this year, I conducted one of the first surveys of the Kurdish Women’s Defense Units known as the YPJ (Yekîneyên Parastina Jin) after witnessing the liberation of Tel Abyad in June and the final days of the battle of Kobani at the end of January. The full results of this research will be released in a forthcoming publication. One of the most surprising findings is that 44 of the 46 respondents did not want to establish an independent state but rather wanted to remain part of Syria.” ([The Washington Post](#))

December 26: 'You will stay here until you die': one woman's rescue from ISIS

“Arezu came with a user guide and a list of defects, so that the buyer could not complain later about her disobedience or bad attitude. She was around 20 years old, and the sound of her crying through several months of ISIS captivity had been so pitiful that it broke her neighbours’ hearts and could have splintered solid stone, the family that rescued her said. Horrified by Arezu’s fate even before they met her, they ended up pooling their savings and putting their own lives on the line for the sake of a desperate stranger, in an extraordinary act of heroism and generosity.” ([The Guardian](#))

Tunisia

December 21: Tunisia dismantles cell recruiting women for militants

“Tunisia said on Monday, December 21 it has dismantled a cell in the northern region of Bizerte recruiting women to marry militants fighting abroad and has made four arrests. The interior ministry

said in a statement that anti-terrorist units led the operation to bust the ‘takfiri’ radical Sunni Muslim network, without saying when the arrests took place.” ([Al Arabiya](#))

Turkey

December 22: Turkey police kill two women in raid on suspected militants

“Turkish police killed two women in a pre-dawn raid on Tuesday, December 22 on a cell of suspected militants in Istanbul, media reports said. The Dogan news agency said the clash, which also left four police lightly wounded, took place in the Gaziosmanpasa district in the north of the European side of the city. The report did not specify which organisation the two suspects—described as “terrorists”—were affiliated with.” ([Middle East Eye](#))

General

December 26: Have Arab women broken any barriers in 2015? (Op-Ed Yara al-Wazir)

“2015 has proven to be a year where the path for the advancement of women in the region was paved, but the path continues to have a lot of cracks – there is plenty more work to be done in 2016.” ([Al Arabiya](#))

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