

MENA Women News Brief

December 5 -December 20, 2016

Algeria

December 10: Algeria praised for its inclusion of women in politics

“Algerian female participation in the political field was hailed during the Fifth Annual Arab-American Day in Washington this week. Organised by the Chamber of Arab-American Commerce and the Council of the Arab Ambassadors, the conference was on Arab women and the enhancement of leadership and resilience. Algeria was highlighted at the conference for its progress in the participation of women in the political field and presence in political decision-making process.” ([Middle East Monitor](#))

Egypt

December 7: Women's rights activist Azza Soliman arrested in Egypt

“Egyptian police have arrested prominent women’s rights advocate Azza Soliman, her foundation and a security source have said, weeks after she was banned from travelling and had her assets frozen. Soliman, founder of the Centre for Egyptian Women’s Legal Assistance (CEWLA), is one of a number of activists, lawyers and journalists to have been prevented from leaving Egypt in the last month.” ([Guardian](#))

December 11: Why Egyptian women are taking to the streets in 1960s-style dresses

“A new Egyptian initiative is calling upon women to wear 1960s-style dresses as a way to fight sexual harassment. The initiative, dubbed ‘Dresses of the Past When Our Streets Were Safe,’ seeks to normalize the sight of women on the streets wearing dresses as it was in the 1960s, when sexual harassment rates were at their lowest. Hadia Abdel-Fattah, the feminist activist behind the initiative, told Al-Monitor, ‘It is not about clothing, because no matter what you wear you will get harassed anyway. That is why we encourage women to wear whatever they like.’” ([Al-Monitor](#))

December 16: Egypt's parliament under fire for controversial child custody bill

“According to women's rights activists in Egypt, a new child custody proposal being considered by the Egyptian parliament is a step backward and an affront to Egyptian women, particularly divorced mothers. Female parliament member Soheir El-Hadi along with 60 parliamentarians have submitted a bill amending Egypt's Personal Status Law 25 of 1929, which regulates all issues related to family, including marriage, divorce and child custody. Hadi's amendments have targeted certain articles on child custody, stirring a hornet's nest of controversy among parliamentarians and citizens.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

Iran

December 5: Iran's political paranoia includes children of foreign fathers

“Based on Iran’s civil code, the marriage of an Iranian woman to a foreign national is dependent upon special permission from the Foreign Ministry. In practice, this means that Iranian women need to get permission to marry non-Iranian Muslims. Iran's civil code forbids Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men. An estimated 70,000 marriages between Iranian women and Afghan men are not registered with the National Organization for Civil Registration.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

December 6: In Iran, Women's Basij Leader Demands Persecution Of Gender-Rights Activism

"The woman who leads female volunteers in Iran's hard-line conservative militia, the Basij, has identified a new foe. Minu Aslani has reportedly called the promotion of gender equality illegal and demanded that the country's powerful judiciary take action against people who speak out against such state-sponsored discrimination. 'These activities are in fact against our laws and the judiciary should take action,' the semiofficial Mehr news agency quoted Aslani as telling reporters on December 2."

([Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#))

Iraq

December 12: For Women Under ISIS, a Tyranny of Dress Code and Punishment

"By the time the jihadists had finished, not even a woman's eyes were legal. Showing them was a punishable offense. The dress code imposed on the women of Mosul started soon after the Islamic State overran the city more than two years ago. It was carried out gradually, until every part of the female body was erased, starting with the face, then the rest of the body – including the hands, which had to be covered with gloves, as well as the feet, which had to be hidden by socks. It ended with an announcement blared over loudspeakers, telling women to wear a film of black cloth over their eyes."

([New York Times](#))

Israel

December 9: After Brouhaha Over Women in Tanks, Israeli Army Wants Women in Warships Too

"The Israel Defense Forces is considering opening additional combat positions to women, including possibly placing women on the Sa'ar 6 warships currently being built in Germany that are to be deployed to protect Israel's offshore natural gas rigs in the Mediterranean. The proposed integration of women in combat positions, including the Armored Corps and the Air Force's search and rescue unit, has sparked opposition among some Orthodox rabbis, particularly over women serving in tank units."

([Haaretz](#))

December 11: Israel Chief Rabbi: Women Shouldn't Go to the Army

"Sephardi Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef said late Saturday, December 10 that women should not join the Israel Defense Forces or even sign up for civilian national service instead. 'All the great sages through the generations, including all Israel's chief rabbis, believe that it is forbidden for girls to go into the army,' Yosef said in a sermon. 'Gentlemen, not just to the army – but to national service too.' Yosef said the drafting of women led to 'calamities.' 'They say there are women pilots, there are all kinds of things. What if there are women pilots? Is that the way of the Torah?' he said." ([Haaretz](#))

December 14: Miniskirt protest takes aim at Israeli parliament's dress codes

"Dozens of female parliamentary aides were denied entry to the Israeli Knesset on Wednesday, December 14. The reason? The lengths of their skirts. More than 40 women who work as assistants and advisers to Israel's parliament members showed up to the Knesset in above-the-knee skirts and dresses to protest what they see as an overzealous dress code enforced only recently against women. Over the past week, at least two female aides said they had either been barred entry or delayed at the door by guards because their dresses were deemed too short." ([Washington Post](#))

December 18: Female MKs slam 'cowardly' decision to parole Katsav

"Female lawmakers on Sunday, December 18 decried as 'cowardly and toxic' the decision to grant former president and convicted rapist Moshe Katsav early release from prison after serving five years of a seven-year jail sentence. The Israel Prisons Service Parole Board's ruling came after Katsav's two previous requests for early release were rejected over his failure to acknowledge his actions or express

any regret. In its Sunday decision, the IPS said it had granted Katsav's request for parole as he has since expressed remorse for his actions." ([Times of Israel](#))

Jordan

December 9: Calls for action as 'honour' killings in Jordan show sharp increase

"Thirty-eight women have been victims of 'honour' killings this year. The country typically reports between 15 and 20 such crimes a year, according to Human Rights Watch. Women's rights activists have used the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, which ends on Saturday, December 10 to call for stronger penalties against the perpetrators of 'honour' crimes and to end the practice of imprisoning women at risk of being killed for their own protection." ([Guardian](#))

December 15: Syrian girls flee war only to become mothers in Jordan camp

"In a crowded maternity clinic at a refugee camp in Jordan near the Syrian border, Elhem cradled her crying 11-month-old son, bounced him on her knee and then handed him to her mother to help calm him down. 'When I had the baby I felt a sense of motherhood and was happy,' the Syrian refugee said through a translator, adjusting her floral niqab. 'I'm a housewife now.'" ([Reuters](#))

Lebanon

December 12: Lebanese activists succeed in first step to repealing controversial 'rape law'

"The Lebanese parliament's Administration and Justice Committee agreed Dec. 7 to abolish Article 522 of the penal code, which allows rapists to avoid prosecution if they marry their victims. The committee is currently discussing a draft law that will be presented later on to parliament, and it is considering amending articles 503-522 about misdemeanors and honor violations, by adding penalties and forcing stricter punishments." ([Al-Monitor](#))

December 19: Lebanon appoints man as first ever women's affairs minister

"Lebanon is on its way to ending more than two years of political deadlock after Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri announced the formation of a new 30-member strong government and cabinet. However, the appointment of Jean Ogasapian – a male ex-army colonel from the centre-right Future Movement party – as the minister in charge of the newly created portfolio for women's affairs has drawn criticism." ([Independent](#))

Libya

December 13: Video: Libya's forgotten women

"More than 250 female African migrants are detained in Surman in Western Libya. Many of them were arrested when they tried to cross the sea to Europe. In the center they lack basic services like health care, sanitation – and most of all hope." ([Deutsche Welle](#))

December 14: They Escaped Islamic State. But Their Horror Hasn't Ended.

"After 14 months as a slave in Libya, the 33-year-old Eritrean had to get away. She could no longer let her Islamic State captors rape, sell, and exchange her or her 14-year-old daughter. That morning, Mesmer shared her plan with her daughter and another 16-year-old Eritrean girl. There were 22 other women holed up in the same building, all of them migrants enslaved by Islamic State. But Mesmer kept the others in the dark, worried that a large group would draw too much attention." ([Reuters via Huffington Post](#))

Palestinian Territories

December 9: These Palestinians aren't just 'dancing pretty.' They're challenging their society.

"While Palestinians might be better known for the dabke folk dance, these women are pushing the boundaries of their conservative society by embracing a more contemporary style of movement. Most of the dancers in the Sareyyet Ramallah company are women in their 20s, although a few are teenagers, and all say they dance to escape from the daily grind of work or the monotony of their studies, as well as from the nearly 50-year Israeli occupation." ([Washington Post](#))

December 14: Concern around secret sentencing to death of Gaza woman

"The case of the first Palestinian woman to be sentenced to death in more than 20 years has raised concerns among human right activists in Gaza. The 26-year-old woman, identified only as Nahia A, was convicted of killing her husband but her trial was held in secret and even her family has distanced themselves publicly from the case." ([The National](#))

Saudi Arabia

December 8: Saudi campaign urges women to report domestic violence

"Alwaleed Philanthropies (AP), chaired by Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal, has launched a two-week online awareness campaign against domestic violence in cooperation with the National Family Safety Program to highlight domestic violence and encourage battered and abused women to speak up." ([Al-Arabiya](#))

December 12: Saudi Police Detain Young Woman for Removing Abaya: Media

"Saudi police detained a young woman for violating modesty rules after she removed her abaya, the loose-fitting, full-length robes women are required to wear, on a main street in the capital Riyadh, local media reported on Monday, December 12." ([Reuters](#))

December 14: Saudi woman architect among Foreign Policy 2016 Global Thinkers list

"Saudi architect professor Haifa al-Hababi has been named in the '[thinkers list](#)' of 2016 released by the US Foreign Policy magazine. Hababi has made the cut for her work in 'seizing suffrage' – the right to vote in political elections in her homeland." ([Al-Arabiya](#))

December 18: Drug testing must for expats marrying Saudi women

"The Saudi Ministry of Health has made mandatory drug testing a part of 'medical check-ups' required for expats before marriage to Saudi women. This rule excludes Saudi citizens. Musha'al al Rubaian, the spokesman of the ministry, told Al-Hayat newspaper: 'The decree issued by Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, the Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister, includes drug testing to be part of medical check-ups to marry Saudi women and is obligatory solely for expats, not Saudis.'" ([Al-Arabiya](#))

December 19: Saudi officials say more professions should be open to women -newspapers

"A senior Saudi cleric and a health ministry official said women should be allowed to work as paramedics and opticians, Saudi newspapers reported on Monday, December 19, part of a push to relax strict labour codes in the ultra-conservative kingdom. The government announced an economic reform plan in June that aims to increase the number of women as a proportion of the workforce to 28 percent from 23 percent by 2020 and to quadruple the number of women in senior civil service roles to 5 percent." ([Thomson Reuters Foundation](#))

Syria

December 11: Why some Egyptians prefer Syrian wives

"For as long as the Syrian war has raged, there have been stories throughout the Middle East about Syrian refugee women being in demand for marriage – sometimes willingly, sometimes not. Egypt is no exception. Umm Ammar, who is in her 30s, became a widow when her husband died in an accident. As a now 'single' refugee, she is one of many Syrian women sought out by Egyptian men who consider them the perfect partners – often for reasons far from flattering, such as low dowries. This phenomenon has sparked controversy in Egyptian and Syrian circles." ([Al-Monitor](#))

December 19: Girl, 7, who tweeted from Aleppo is evacuated from Syrian city

"A seven-year-old Syrian girl who captured global attention with her Twitter updates from besieged Aleppo has been evacuated and will be brought to Turkey with her family, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said. Helped by her mother Fatemah, who manages the @AlabedBana account, Bana Alabed has uploaded pictures and videos of life during the nearly six-year-old Syrian war, gaining around 331,000 followers on the micro-blogging site since September." ([Reuters](#))

Tunisia

December 14: Tunisian court approves marriage of pregnant 13-year-old

"A Tunisian court Tuesday, December 13 has approved the marriage of a 13-year-old girl to a 20-year-old relative who made her pregnant, a move that caused an uproar among organizations concerned with children's rights in the country. The marriage between the girl, from the northwestern region of Kef, and the brother of her brother-in-law took place in the presence of their parents, despite attempts to stop it." ([CNN](#))

Turkey

December 7: Crackdown in Turkey Threatens a Haven of Gender Equality Built by Kurds

"Kurdish towns must, by general agreement, have co-mayors, one man, one woman. All members of Parliament have to run on gender-balanced tickets. New hires to municipal and patronage jobs go to women until the work force is half male, half female. There is one big problem with this aspect of Kurdish life, in Turkey at least: It has, in effect, been outlawed as part of the Turkish government's crackdown after a failed coup attempt last summer." ([New York Times](#))

December 14: Turkey neglecting women while trying to improve image

"Turkey's government is continuing to neglect its women as it seeks to improve its image abroad following July's attempted coup, according to the head of the Turkish Businesswomen's Association (TIKAD). 'Women's NGOs should have been present' in the delegations sent abroad, but they almost all consisted of men, Nilüfer Bulut said. 'I favor equal representation.'" ([Hurriyet](#))

December 18: Turkey's women-only volunteer group comforts Syrian refugees, helps them build a new life

"A group of women residing in Ankara have been supporting hundreds of Syrians, notably women and children, for the last two years, creating opportunities to better them for social life. Around 100 women from different ages and professions initiated the project by first visiting the Syrians' homes one by one, turning out a big volunteer campaign already subject to a scientific study that is being carried out at Ankara University." ([Daily Sabah](#))

United Arab Emirates

December 11: Sheikha Fatima: Global Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament reflects UAE's unity

"An international summit of female parliamentary leaders reflects the UAE's support for global dialogue, Sheikha Fatima said on Sunday, December 11. 'Being convened under the overall theme United for Shaping the Future, the summit holds a significant value for the UAE, which represents a unique model of unity,' said Sheikha Fatima, Mother of the Nation and Chairwoman of the General Women's Union." ([The National](#))

December 18: Majority of UAE women happy with workplace equality

"More than half of women respondents in the UAE feel that they are offered jobs based on their experience, and that gender plays no role in the decision of a manager when hiring them, a recent survey by Bayt.com and YouGov has found. The survey measures the perceptions of women in the region, when it comes to equality at work, motivations for employment, challenges faced at work, as well as career and life ambitions." ([Khaleej Times](#))

Yemen

December 19: In pictures: Yemen's displaced women and girls

"Yemen's war between forces loyal to the internationally-recognised government of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and those allied to the Houthi rebel movement has devastated tens of thousands of lives through death, injury and displacement. Women and girls constitute half of the 2.18 million people who have been internally displaced. Here are stories of some of them now living in the Dharwan settlement, outside the capital, Sanaa." ([BBC](#))

Opinions/Analysis

December 11: How Islam Can Fight the Patriarchy (Riada Asimovic Akyol)

"Why was the government responsive to protests and outrage this time when previous attempts to reject radical changes to government policy failed? Opposition to the government's bill was widespread, but a large amount of credit must go to open-minded Islamists – in particular, Islamist women." ([New York Times](#))

December 14: There Aren't Enough (Female) Judges in Jerusalem (Elah Alkalay)

"The date for choosing new Supreme Court justices to replace those who will be retiring is getting closer, and the judicial appointments committee has an opportunity to take a big step for gender equality by nominating four women, so that starting in 2017, there will be seven women justices of the 15 who make up the country's most senior judicial panel." ([Haaretz](#))

Report: Women's Labor Force Participation Across the GCC (Karen E. Young)

"Women are underrepresented in the labor force, in the public and private sectors, across the GCC. Where there is greater integration of both national and non-national women in the labor force, there is also generally more opportunity for women's political participation." ([Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington](#))

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