

MENA Women News Brief

February 15-February 28, 2017

Egypt

February 16: Egypt gets first woman provincial governor

"Egyptian President Abdul Fattah Al-Sisi on Thursday, February 16, swore in Nadia Abdu as the country's first female provincial governor in modern times. Abdu, in her sixties, has been appointed as governor of the coastal province of Beheira. Her appointment is part of a reshuffle of provincial governors unveiled on Thursday, February 16. The shake-up included three other newcomers." ([Gulf News](#))

February 16: How this Egyptian woman overcame roadblocks to become a mechanic

"Despite living in the highly conservative society of Upper Egypt, Lekaa El Kholy has managed to shatter social norms, making her way into an unconventional and male-dominated career – car maintenance. Being the first female auto mechanic in Upper Egypt, Kholy has blazed the trail for Egyptian women, smashing the myth of traditional female jobs." ([Al Monitor](#))

February 22: Egypt's Grand Mufti expected to publish document favoring women's rights

"As Egyptian president Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi announced that 2017 is the 'women's year', al-Azhar will issue a document detailing women's rights that were granted by the Holy Quran and the prophet's teaching to show the people the real, valid Sharia law and refute incorrect Fatwas that have become entrenched in the Egyptian community." ([Al Bawaba](#))

February 24: Female preachers officially find their way to Egypt's pulpits

"Egypt's Ministry of Religious Endowments recently announced the appointment of 144 female preachers who will take up their positions in the female-only sections of several prominent mosques starting in March. According to the ministry, this is the first step in activating female participation in preaching work, and more female preachers will be added in the future." ([Al Monitor](#))

Iran

February 15: Iranian women dressed as men barred from football game

"Eight Iranian girls who disguised themselves as boys to attend a football match despite an official ban were prevented from entering the stadium, an official was quoted as saying Tuesday, February 14. Iran argues that its ban on women attending football matches in the same stadiums as men is necessary to protect them from lewd language that might emanate from the terraces." ([Your Middle East](#))

February 21: Teenage Girl Beaten by Morality Police for Wearing Ripped Jeans

"A teenage girl celebrating her birthday was beaten by Iran's morality police for wearing ripped jeans. The story was first reported by the U.K.'s the Independent, which is withholding the 14-year-old girl's name due to the family's fear of reprisals. Zahra*, who lives in Iran, told the news outlet that during the celebration in the city of Shiraz, a van of morality police drove up and tried to force her and her teenage girlfriends into the vehicle. When they resisted, police threatened them with pepper spray, hit them, and pulled their hair." ([Yahoo](#))

February 22: Living as a Lesbian in Iran, Where Being Gay Is Illegal

"Growing up, the 25-year-old says she was often bullied for her 'boyish' looks. But several years ago, the harassment took on a more sinister form when she was arrested and tortured by Iranian

Revolutionary Guards. The guards had found a short story by Azadeh about two male soldiers who were lovers during the war, after a tip-off from a girl Azadeh says held a personal grudge against her.” [\(Broadly\)](#)

February 23: Will this woman become Iran’s first female president?

“Iran may see its first female presidential candidate in the May 19 elections. After a period of silence, Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi, the Islamic Republic’s first and only female minister, has in recent days and weeks made headlines once again.” [\(Al Monitor\)](#)

Iraq

February 22: New hope for Yazidi women raped and tortured by IS fighters

“It’s been less than two weeks since Perwin Ali Baku escaped the Islamic State group, after more than two years in captivity, bought and sold from fighter to fighter and carted from Iraq to Syria and then back again. When a door slams, the 23-year-old Yazidi woman flashes back to her captors locking away her 3-year-old daughter, captured with her, to torment her. When she hears a loud voice, she cringes at the thought of them barking orders.” [\(Albuquerque Journal\)](#)

Israel

February 22: Israeli parliament takes closer look at staffers' skirts

“Israel's parliament will retain a contentious dress code banning short skirts, but will make its enforcement and sanctions against offenders gradual, a committee of MPs and parliamentary staff ruled. The decision on Tuesday, February 21 came after staffers had demonstrated in December when colleagues who wore skirts deemed too short were barred from entering the building.” [\(Al Monitor\)](#)

Jordan

February 26: Royal committee responds to women advocates’ long-time demands

“A Royal committee on Sunday, February 26 recommended the scrapping of the controversial Article 308 of the Penal Code, which allows sexual assault perpetrators to escape punishment if they marry their victims. The Royal Committee for Developing the Judiciary and Enhancing the Rule of Law (RCDJERL), chaired by former Prime Minister Zeid Rifai, on Sunday, February 26, handed His Majesty King Abdullah the report after four months of discussions.” [\(Jordan Times\)](#)

Libya

February 22: Libya's eastern authority freezes women's travel ban

“The authorities in eastern Libya have ordered a temporary freeze on a controversial travel ban on Libyan women under the age of 60. The directive, which came into force last weekend, was widely condemned and ridiculed across the country. Affecting women in eastern Libya, it prohibited those under the age of 60 from travelling abroad without a male guardian.” [\(BBC\)](#)

Saudi Arabia

February 15: Women's rights activist questioned in Saudi

“Arabian authorities on Wednesday, February 15, questioned the sister of jailed blogger Raif Badawi over her activism, the second time in 12 months, she said on Twitter.” [\(The Daily Star-Lebanon\)](#)

February 20: A Woman Is Named CEO of a Saudi Commercial Bank for the First Time

“Rania Nashar was named chief executive of Samba Financial Group on Monday, February 20, becoming the first female CEO of a listed Saudi commercial bank in line with the government's

economic and social reforms. Nashar is a board member of Samba's global markets subsidiary and a Pakistani unit, and has nearly 20 years of experience in banking." ([Fortune](#))

February 20: Saudi Arabia allows licenses for women only gyms

"In its latest set of reforms, the Saudi government has announced that it will begin granting licenses for women only gyms this month. The gyms will solely be used to motivate women to get fit, amid rising obesity among in the Gulf kingdom. They will not be allowed to organize competitive sports programs, such as football and boxing." ([Middle East Monitor](#))

February 22: Saudi women gaining a foothold in filmmaking

"On the eve of leaving for the US to study animation filmmaking at the University of Missouri for a semester, Bushra Al-Andijani's professor in Saudi Arabia told her she was one of his weakest students and she would not do well in the program. But Al-Andijani returned as one of the top students of the semester in her American class much to the surprise, and perhaps the chagrin, of her Saudi instructor." ([Zawya](#))

February 27: Role of women in Saudi economic growth 'vital'

"Gender diversity in the workplace remains a key issue for employers in the GCC region. This is one of the key findings of a new report developed by the Pearl Initiative, the UAE-based business-led non-profit organization, and Sharjah Business Women Council, and launched in collaboration with PepsiCo, in Riyadh today (February 27)." ([Zawya](#))

Syria

February 25: Syrian women demand justice for detainees

"In a blustery square across the street from the United Nations headquarters in Geneva, five Syrian women stood silent and still, each holding an elegantly framed photograph. Their goal was to pressure de Mistura into bringing the issue of Syrian detainees to the forefront of his discussions with the government and opposition. Each woman held up the image of a loved one disappeared by Syrian government forces over the course of the six-year war." ([Al Jazeera](#))

Turkey

February 22: Female officers allowed to wear headscarves

"Turkey has for the first time allowed female members of the armed forces to wear headscarves while on duty as part of their uniform. Women serving in the armed forces 'will be able to cover their heads' under their caps or berets so long as the headscarf is 'the same color as the uniform and without pattern,' said a new defense ministry regulation announced on Wednesday, February 22." ([Al Jazeera](#))

February 27: Glamorous female pilot's Instagram account that's an internet hit

"A female pilot has become an internet hit for posting envy-inducing photos of her life in a bid to encourage more women to fly planes. Eser Aksan Erdogan's Instagram is jam-packed with images showing her at work inside the cockpit of her Pegasus Airlines jet as well as enjoying time off in various exotic locations." ([Traveller](#))

United Arab Emirates

February 27: My UAE: how director Maitha Al Awadi is wowing the big screen

"At the age of 16, Maitha Al Awadi made the bold move of leaving her home in Dubai to embark on her bachelor's degree in Australia. This self-reliant streak, however, didn't always come naturally to the now 27-year-old Emirati filmmaker." ([The National](#))

Regional

February 16: Gender Pay Gap: Belittling Arab Women's Efforts Because They Are Not the 'Breadwinners'

"The gender pay gap is not an issue that is limited to the Arab World; it has its share of debates worldwide, even in Hollywood. According to the United Nations, 'If men and women played an identical role in labor markets, as much as \$28 trillion, or 26 percent, could be added to the global annual GDP by 2015.'" [\(Egyptian Streets\)](#)

February 21: Nike commercial celebrates Arab female athletes 'to inspire others'

"'What will they say about you?' is a rhetorical question with which many women and girls in the Middle East are all too familiar. Young women pursuing their dreams irrespective of the rigid traditional gender roles in the region often find themselves under the scrutiny of their communities." [\(CNN\)](#)

February 22: Islamic State fighters rape and torture Sunni Arab women: Human Rights Watch

"Sunni Arab Muslim women and girls suffered arbitrary detentions, beatings, sexual abuse, and forced marriage under Islamic State rule, the watchdog Human Rights Watch reported on Monday, February 20. HRW said its researchers interviewed six women who had escaped from the town of Hawija, in northern Iraq south of Mosul. It was the first time the group had been able to document IS abuses against Sunni Arab women in Iraq." [\(Egypt Independent\)](#)

February 26: Woman-Led Tala Raises \$30 Million Series B For Micro-Loans Via Smartphone

"Tala, a startup that makes micro-loans to entrepreneurs in the developing world via smartphone app, has raised a \$30 million Series B round as it expands into new geographical markets. The round marks the largest Series B raised by a woman founder in recent memory; in 2016, cult beauty brand Glossier raised \$24 million. This infusion of capital brings Tala's total fundraising to over \$44 million since 2012."

[\(Forbes-Middle East\)](#)

February 27: #SheMeansBusiness helps women entrepreneurs grow their business online

"Sarah Beydoun was researching a project that helps to rehabilitate female ex-prisoners for her sociology thesis when an idea came to her. If someone equipped them with career skills, they could use them to help rebuild their lives." [\(The National\)](#)

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