

# **MENA Women News Brief**

**February 2, 2016-February 16, 2016**

## **Egypt**

### **February 2: Will 'girl zones' help Egyptian women?**

“The Girl Zone project, started by six young people from Banha, Egypt, aims to provide women with services and facilities that are not otherwise available in rural areas. The project in Banha, about 30 miles north of Cairo, is the first of its kind. The group is seeking to expand the project in the future. The project provides entertainment and education for young women—or does it isolate them?” ([Al Monitor](#))

### **February 5: Female Genital Mutilation Among Egyptian Teenage Girls Drops By 27 Percent**

“Female genital mutilation (FGM) among Egyptian girls aged 15 to 19 has declined by a significant 27 percent in the past 30 years, found the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on FGM. According to the *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Global Concern* report, which is the most up-to-date compilation of statistics on FGM ever compiled, FGM among teenage girls in Egypt dropped from 97 percent in 1985 to 70 percent in 2015.” ([Egyptian Streets](#))

### **February 14: Egypt, Japan collaborate together to improve gender inequality issues**

“Dozens of diplomats, civil servants, and women’s rights advocates from Egypt and Japan were brought together in Cairo on Sunday, February 14, to discuss a potential first-time partnership between the two nations concerning the economic and political empowerment of women.” ([Daily News Egypt](#))

### **February 15: Egypt TV show suspended over 'disrespectful remarks' about women**

“Egyptian officials have suspended a television talk show after a guest suggested that almost a third of the country's women were unfaithful to their husbands. The country's media authority has banned the show for 15 days after complaints about the comments. The guest, Tamour al-Sobky, has said his comments were taken out of context.” ([BBC](#))

### **February 15: Women Wearing Niqab Banned from Working at Cairo University’s Hospitals**

“All women working at Cairo University’s hospitals have been banned from wearing the niqab (full face-veil), announced Doctor Gaber Nassar, the President of Cairo University. According to Aswat Masriya, the decision, which came into effect on Sunday, February 14, applies to teaching staff, doctors, students, nurses, and any technical workers who are either working at the hospitals or training there.” ([Egyptian Streets](#))

## **Iran**

### **February 4: Many Iranian women and youth feel failed by reformists ahead of vote**

“Many Iranian women and young people are disillusioned about the upcoming elections, desperate for reform but losing hope in their pragmatic president and his promise of a freer society. The Friday, February 26 parliamentary poll will see pro-reform candidates, who broadly back President Hassan Rouhani, attempt to overturn the majority held by conservative hardliners in the 290-seat assembly. It will be a test of public support for Rouhani himself ahead of presidential elections next year.” ([Reuters](#))

### **February 8: Rouhani calls for more Iranian women to 'lean in' to politics**

“Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani encouraged greater female participation in politics and culture at a conference Monday, February 8 titled ‘Women, Moderation and Development.’ Rouhani said that

women's rights in Iran have come a long way since the first days of the 1979 revolution. Rouhani said that the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, had rejected extreme opinions and said that women were encouraged to both protest in the streets and chant slogans." ([Al Monitor](#))

#### **February 11: Iranians speak out over sexual harassment scandal**

"Allegations of sexual harassment at an Iranian TV station are emboldening Iranian women to break their silence and share their experiences of a problem traditionally not acknowledged inside the country. Sheena Shirani, a newsreader at Press TV, the state broadcaster's English language news channel, broke the taboo by speaking out about sexual harassment she says she endured from two of her managers over a prolonged period of time." ([BBC](#))

#### **February 16: Iranian, Turkish women to cooperate in fight for women rights**

"An Iranian women's group has proposed to work together with Turkish women in their fight for women's rights, after Iranian President Hassan Rouhani gave a speech on female empowerment on Monday, February 8 at a conference titled 'Women, Moderation and Development' in Tehran." ([Hurriyet](#))

### **Iraq**

#### **February 3: ISIS Widow Raises Rare Public Complaints Of Islamic State Leadership**

"It is rare for those under Islamic State group control to publicly voice criticism of the extremist group's leadership. But as the militants lost millions of dollars in recent months to a U.S.-led airstrike campaign, a widow's complaint that the families of dead ISIS fighters are not being properly supported financially spread across pro-ISIS social media." ([International Business Times](#))

### **Israel**

#### **February 5: Why some Israelis are taking to social media to expose sexual harassment**

"Israeli society is undergoing a transformation as women talk about sexual harassment on social media, which is becoming the public arena for exposing misconduct instead of filing a complaint with the police." ([Al Monitor](#))

#### **February 14: With Rise in Domestic Violence, Israeli Victims Search for Solutions**

"Last year a total of 755 women, an increase of about 20 percent over 2014, took refuge in one of Israel's 14 shelters for women who are victims of domestic violence. Another 60 women contacted the shelters for help last year, but didn't move in because there was no available space. And many don't manage to put their lives back together after leaving the shelter." ([Haaretz](#))

### **Lebanon**

#### **February 15: Behind closed doors: mobilizing Lebanon's migrant maids**

"Lebanon's nascent domestic workers union is the first of its kind in the Arab world. The union has started to organize demonstrations, lobby the labor ministry for more rights for domestic workers, and provided moral support for hundreds of women working as maids, cooks, cleaners and nannies, many far away from their homes and families. While many women who migrate to Lebanon to be domestic workers find good families and safe, stable employment, others are not so fortunate." ([The Guardian](#))

## **Libya**

### **February 3: UN arms Libyan women with gun-safety knowledge**

“Women are inordinately affected by gun violence in Libya, but UN officials hope to train them not only in firearm safety, but also to use their matriarchal positions to influence their families.” ([Al Monitor](#))

## **Morocco**

### **February 9: Rising Obesity Disproportionately Affects Moroccan Women**

“Rapid urbanization and rising incomes in Morocco have led to a rise in obesity in recent years, particularly in women, according to research by Fulbright scholar Anna Boots. Moroccans of the past generation, especially those who lived in the desert regions, struggled mainly with undernourishment issues as a result of the infertility of the arid land.” ([Morocco World News](#))

### **February 12: Loubna Abidar, Moroccan Actress, Finds Fame Tinged With Fury**

“The first indication the actress Loubna Abidar had that her life was about to change was on the flight home to Morocco after the premiere of the movie ‘Much Loved,’ in which she plays a prostitute. She was shocked when a flight attendant told her she was ‘a disgrace for Morocco and Moroccan women.’ ‘We shouldn’t be a country that is scared of art. I want the Moroccan woman to wake up,’ said Abidar.” ([New York Times](#))

## **Palestinian Territories**

### **February 12: How one Palestinian minister is empowering women**

“Haifa al-Agha, Palestinian minister of women's affairs, talks to Al-Monitor about the challenges women face in Palestinian society. She said the accumulation of violence against Palestinian women has made them tough as nails and an example for endurance and the ability to adapt in the face of adversity.” ([Al Monitor](#))

## **Saudi Arabia**

### **February 3: Saudi Arabia Orders Women Segregated From Men in Council Meetings**

“Saudi Arabia has ordered the segregation of men and women in local council meetings, in a setback to women’s rights in the ultraconservative kingdom. Under the new rules, which follow the recent election of women to Saudi Arabia’s local councils, female representatives must now participate in the council meetings through a video link. The men will be able to hear their female colleagues, but not see them.” ([Wall Street Journal](#))

### **February 3: Saudi Arabian Women's Sports Chip Away at Stereotypes**

“Twenty-year-old Nour Gary has been playing basketball for 10 years, but her father has never attended her games. Men are not allowed courtside during women’s games in Saudi Arabia, so she plays with her father privately for fun. All women who play sports in the kingdom need permission from a male ‘guardian,’ usually a father or husband. Some parents refuse, Gary said, but hers are happy to oblige.” ([Voice of America](#))

### **February 8: Saudi women working in senior corporate positions lowest in Gulf**

“Despite females filling more university seats than males in Saudi Arabia, only 20 percent of the current workforce is occupied by women. The latest report on women’s careers in the GCC published by Pearl Initiative in 2015 revealed that 52 percent of university students are women.” ([Saudi Gazette](#))

### **February 12: Saudi woman leads Kingdom’s genome project team**

“A Saudi woman has proved once again sky is the limit for excellence. Faculty member at Harvard University and fellow of the American Board of Molecular Genetic Pathology Dr. Malak Abid Al-Thaqafi has received a number of awards and accolades, including letters of appreciation from various leaders for her scientific work on genes. The genome focuses on identifying the genetic basis of diseases in Saudi population.” ([Saudi Gazette](#))

**February 12: Saudi FM: We can't rush policy on women's right to drive**

“Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Adel al-Jubeir defended his country's treatment of women on Friday, February 12, saying it had made progress on female education but would take time to let them drive cars. Adel al-Jubeir told an audience at the Munich Security Conference. He said it was unfair to fixate on the issue of women drivers, given his country's efforts to educate girls.” ([Middle East Eye](#))

**Syria**

**February 3: Syria peace talks will include women, but will their voices be heard?**

“As representatives from the Syrian government and rebel groups sit down to peace talks to try and bring an end to the country’s long civil war this week, those present at the negotiation table may include, to a greater degree than ever before, women. Twelve representatives from Syrian women’s organizations have been invited to participate in the talks as part of a Women’s Advisory Board, offering their ‘ground-level perspective’ on five years of brutal war.” ([New York Times](#))

**February 4: U.N. official - Syrian women seek abortions and suffer rapes because of war**

“The ravages of Syria's civil war include an increase in women who are having abortions and suffering injuries consistent with rape, a top United Nations official said. Babatunde Osotimehin, executive director of the U.N. Population Fund, also said girls are being married off so their families can pass responsibility for them to somebody else. ‘We want the world to know that in conflict, the most vulnerable and the ones who suffer most are women and girls,’ Osotimehin said.” ([USA Today](#))

**February 4: Fearless Syrian Women Volunteer To Pick Up The Pieces After Bombings**

“While delegations debated Syria’s future, 30-year-old Nojod was in the southern Syrian province of Daraa. Nojod is a member of the Syria Civil Defense (SCD), a group of civilian volunteers who pull bomb victims from the rubble of their homes. Recruits were previously all men but now, equipped with search and rescue training and new ambulances, two teams of women are preparing to save lives in this long-standing civil war.” ([International Business Times](#))

**February 8: Woman accused of holding U.S. aid worker hostage in Syria is charged**

“Federal prosecutors filed a criminal charge Monday, February 8 against an Iraqi woman accused of taking hostage an American aid worker who was killed last year in Syria. The Iraqi woman, known as Umm Sayyaf or Nisreen Assad Ibrahim Bahar, was captured in May in a U.S. commando raid in eastern Syria. Her husband, a senior Islamic State official, was killed in the assault. Authorities allege that Sayyaf played a role in the imprisonment of Kayla Mueller, 26, of Prescott, Arizona, who was repeatedly abused and raped by the leader of the Islamic State.” ([Washington Post](#))

**Tunisia**

**February 2: Tunisia's single mothers still struggle to overcome stigma**

“The situation of unmarried mothers, faced with a delicate dilemma and deprived of rights, makes a telling allegory for modern Tunisia—a country increasingly liberated but that still promotes conservative values. On one side, the mere existence of unmarried mothers breaks the great taboo of premarital sex.



According to a survey by the Pew Research Center from 2013, 89% of Tunisians say sex outside of marriage is ‘morally wrong.’” ([Al Monitor](#))

## **Turkey**

### **February 9: Female police officer to run new domestic violence bureau**

“Turkey’s top police body has appointed a female police officer as the head of a newly-founded bureau in the Istanbul Police Department, one among dozens that were established across the country specializing in domestic violence against women and children.” ([Hurriyet](#))

## **United Arab Emirates**

### **February 4: The women's majlis - Feminist Twitter has ruffled feathers**

“Late last year, a group of Emirati women launched an account on Twitter with the handle @feministsinae. Their purpose of doing this was to promote social awareness of women's issue in the UAE, and to start a conversation regarding women's rights, general roles and patriarchy in the UAE. The account was instantly popular: it gained several hundred followers in a matter of weeks.” ([The National](#))

### **February 10: More women in UAE’s sweeping cabinet reshuffle**

“Women now make up around one third of the UAE’s federal cabinet positions after the country unveiled sweeping new changes on Wednesday, February 10. Under the changes, women have been appointed to head up several posts, including the newly-created ministries of Happiness and Tolerance. Women have been appointed to head up both posts. Women now make up eight of the 29 members of the federal cabinet.” ([Al Arabiya](#))

## **General**

### **February 3: Women employees in MENA face challenges**

“A senior International Labor Organization (ILO) official, Deborah France-Massin, has said that challenges for women employees in MENA are similar to those in other parts of the world. They enter the workplace that is pretty much segmented. The MENA region has the lowest representation globally for women in management and leadership positions, and this conference is an opportunity to look at solutions towards maximizing their contributions at work.” ([Muscat Daily](#))

### **February 8: Female Genital Mutilation—The Numbers Keep Rising (Robin Wright)**

“The United Nations disclosed a stunning figure this month: The number of females whose genitals have been scraped, pricked, or sliced off their young bodies has been underestimated—by seventy million. In Egypt, UNICEF notes, sixty-five per cent of the mutilations are performed at home, using a blade or a razor; twenty-five per cent are performed without anesthetic.” ([The New Yorker](#))

### **February 13: Arab Women in science – where are they heading?**

“In the Middle East, more women enroll in degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) related subjects than men, a study by The Economist revealed recently. February 11 this year was also marked as the first ever International Day of Women and Girls in Science.” ([Al Arabiya](#))

**By Nishaat Shaik**



**Additional MENA Women’s News Briefs are available [here](#).**

Follow the Middle East Program on Twitter @WilsonCenterMEP  and Facebook 