

# **MENA Women's News Brief**

**January 12, 2014 – January 26, 2015**

## **January 21: (Op-Ed) When Women Become Terrorists by Jayne Huckerby**

“While much will be made in the coming months of France’s intelligence failures, the West’s inability to appreciate the role that women play in terror should come under the highest scrutiny. Take the role of women in the Islamic State group, also known as ISIS or ISIL. While the group oppresses many women, many also flock to its ranks. Roughly 10 percent of its Western recruits are female, often lured by their peers through social media and instant messaging. The percentage is much higher in France: An estimated 63 of the 350 French nationals believed to be with the group are women, or just under 20 percent.” ([The New York Times](#))

## **Egypt**

### **January 16: Egyptian women take to social media to expose harassers**

“Egyptian women have been using a number of hashtags—among them #Idon’tFeelSafeOnTheStreet, #AntiHarassment and #ExposeHarasser—on social networking sites to speak up about the daily sexual harassment they experience. These campaigns are part of an effort to expose harassers and break the silence surrounding their crimes, which are haunting women in Egypt. Women have tweeted myriad incidents along with advocating the courage to expose and confront harassers.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

### **January 21: Egypt's endowments ministry welcomes women preachers**

“Egypt's endowment ministry has announced volunteering opportunities for the position of women preachers, in cooperation with the National Council for Women. The announcement, published on Tuesday, January 20 on the ministry's website, called for women interested in either ‘preaching, teaching preventive medicine or human development’ to work in women-only sections of mosques, forums, and lectures. Last year, a series of decrees by former interim president Adly Mansour and the endowments ministry tightened the government's control over mosques and preachers.” ([Ahram Online](#))

### **January 22: (Op-Ed) In Egypt, Sowing Seeds of Gender Equality**

“Sara—I’m using that name to protect her privacy—took another path. Today, she is 35 and unmarried. For her work teaching Arabic to foreigners, she travels across Cairo giving private lessons. Her choice has made relations with her family dangerous and drawn severe criticism from her conservative community, where it’s unusual for women to leave the house without a trusted male companion, and women are labeled promiscuous if they fraternize with men outside the family—particularly foreigners who, according to Sara’s family, ‘have no morals.’” ([New York Times](#))

### **January 23: (Op-Ed) Bitter Anniversary for Egyptian Women**

“The streets are empty. The prisons are full. The fourth anniversary of Egypt's ‘25 January Revolution’ is passing largely in silence, with many of the young activists who led it now firmly behind bars. For many women in Egypt, this Sunday, January 25 will bring back particularly bitter memories—of a brief moment when it seemed that a better future was finally within reach. Women stood alongside men throughout the 2011 uprising. However, in the years since they have faced a rising tide of violence and discrimination. Testimonies uncovered by Amnesty International show women enduring violence at the hands of their partners, the public and the police.” ([Huffington Post](#))

### **January 26: Egypt court convicts doctor of female genital mutilation**

“An Egyptian appeals court on Monday, January 26 convicted a doctor of manslaughter and performing female genital mutilation that led to the death of a 13-year-old girl, sentencing him to two years and three months in prison in the country’s first case that came to trial over the widespread practice, defense lawyers said. The doctor, Raslan Fadl, was initially acquitted of the 2013 death of Sohair el-Batea in a village in the Nile Delta province of Dakahliya. He was not present in court Monday, January 26 and his whereabouts were unknown. The verdict was ‘a triumph for women,’ said lawyer Reda el-Danbouki, who represented the deceased. Egypt has one of the highest rates of female genital mutilation in the world and criminalized the practice in 2008, but it remains widespread.” ([Washington Post](#))

## **Iran**

### **January 22: Women, children are main victims of sanctions: Iranian VP**

“The Iranian vice president for women and family affairs says women and children are the main victims of extremism, violence, and unfair sanctions. Shahindokht Molaverdi made the remarks during a meeting with Finnish Ambassador to Tehran Harri Kamarainen, according to ISNA. Molaverdi noted that despite the fact that Iran has made considerable progresses in achieving women’s rights, like other countries women in Iran are still facing various challenges. She also stated that all countries should join hands in a bid to constrain extremism and violence, which have become global phenomena.” ([Tehran Times](#))

### **January 23: Iranian women stand united in protest and hope at Asian Cup**

“Kian (not her real name) and several other activists have been working quietly on protest banners for the past few months, which they smuggled in and unveiled at the quarter-final in Canberra. On the 65th minute mark, a banner carrying the face of Ghoncheh Ghavami was briefly unveiled in the Gregan-Larkham Stand. Ghavami is a young British-Iranian woman who was placed in prison for trying to attend a volleyball match in 2014. A second banner was also planned to be unfurled inside the stadium, but in the excitement Kian simply couldn’t find the time. In English, it read ‘Thanks for censoring us!’ and in Farsi below ‘Don’t be tired!’” ([The Guardian](#))

## **Iraq**

### **January 14: Female Yazidi captives forced to give blood to wounded Islamist fighters: survivor**

“Female Yazidi captives are being forced to donate blood to wounded Islamic State (IS) fighters, according to a pregnant teenager who escaped after being seized and held captive by IS militants. The 19-year-old, identified as Hamshe, said she and her baby were held for 28 days by IS militants, who she believes killed her husband, brother-in-law and father-in-law.” ([Reuters](#))

### **January 20: UN: ISIS Executing “Educated Women” in Iraq**

“The United Nations on Tuesday, January 20 decried numerous executions of civilians in Iraq by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) group, warning that educated women appeared to be especially at risk. The jihadist group is showing a ‘monstrous disregard for human life’ in the areas it controls in Iraq, the UN human rights office said. The group, which controls large swathes of territory in Iraq and in neighboring war-ravaged Syria, last week published pictures of the ‘crucifixions’ of two men accused of being bandits, and of a woman being stoned to death, allegedly for adultery. Numerous other women have also reportedly been executed recently in ISIS-controlled areas, including Mosul, UN spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani told reporters. She said ‘educated, professional women, particularly

women who have run as candidates in elections for public office, seem to be particularly at risk.” ([Al-Akhbar](#))

### **January 24: Colorado woman gets 4 years for wanting to join ISIS**

“A federal judge gave a four-year prison sentence Friday, January 23 to a 19-year-old Colorado woman who admitted guilt in wanting to become an ISIS bride and participate in its undertakings in the Mideast. Shannon Maureen Conley is one of the first Americans to be sentenced for conspiracy to support ISIS and received a sentence that was also recommended by prosecutors seeking to send a message of deterrence. Though the judge initially cited how Conley needs psychiatric care, he sided with prosecutors in the end. Before sentencing, Conley wept as she read a statement saying, ‘It was after arrest that I learned the truth about the ISIS that I was taught to respect.’” ([CNN](#))

### **January 25: Who is Sajida al-Rishawi? And why does ISIS care about her?**

“She’s remembered as the would-be bomber whose device failed to detonate in a string of otherwise deadly terror attacks at Jordanian hotels in 2005. Sajida al-Rishawi is referred to as an ‘imprisoned sister’ of the terrorist group in a message purportedly posted online by a known ISIS supporter. The message proposes a swap of al-Rishawi for Japanese hostage Kenji Goto. Al-Rishawi, who is being held by authorities in Jordan, has not been seen publicly in nine years.” ([CNN](#))

## **Israel**

### **January 13: Newspaper in Israel Scrubs Women From a Photo of Paris Unity Rally**

“Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany was right there next to the president of France on Sunday, January 11 marching through the streets of Paris for all the world to see — all the world, that is, except the readers of an ultra-Orthodox newspaper in Israel. The newspaper, *HaMevaser*, altered a third-page photograph of the march to remove Ms. Merkel and other female leaders, setting off snickers and satire on social media.” ([New York Times](#))

### **January 20: Israel's first ever ultra-Orthodox women’s party makes bold debut**

“The first-ever Israeli political party dedicated to ultra-Orthodox women, was unveiled Monday, January 19. Heading the party, called ‘B’Zhutan: Haredi Women Making Change’ is Ruth Colian, 33, a veteran social activist and feminist who declared that this was a ‘historic’ step in a mission to ‘guarantee representation in the Knesset for ultra-Orthodox women.’ At a Tel Aviv press conference Colian made the announcement flanked by two other young women who had accepted invitations to run on her list in the upcoming elections—Noa Erez and Keren Muzan. ([Haaretz](#))

## **Lebanon**

### **January 19: Human Rights Watch: Laws Discriminate Against Women**

“Lebanon’s religion-based personal status laws discriminate against women across the religious spectrum and don’t guarantee their basic rights, Human Rights Watch said in a report released on January 19. Lebanon has 15 separate personal status laws for its recognized religions but no civil code covering issues such as divorce, property rights, or care of children. These laws are administered by autonomous religious courts with little or no government oversight, and often issue rulings that violate women’s human rights.” ([Human Rights Watch](#))

## **Libya**

### **January 19-20: A Meeting of Libyan Women for Peace and Dialogue**

“A group of 35 Libyan women from diverse backgrounds representing all areas of Libya discussed during a 19-20 January 2015, meeting in Tunis, Tunisia, issues related to Libya’s security and peace in support of the Libyan Political Dialogue in Geneva. For the first time in the Libyan context, the women agreed on a joint statement, affirming their demands for a peaceful, democratic and unified Libya, which aligned their diverse perspectives in an effort to ensure that their collective voices for peace are well heard at the national, regional and international levels. The women acknowledged that the dialogue is the only way to resolve many of the problems that Libya faces today and to bring peace to the country.” ([United Nations Support Mission in Libya](#))

## **Saudi Arabia**

### **January 16: Saudi Arabia publicly beheads woman in holy Mecca as blogger lashings are postponed**

“Authorities in Saudi Arabia have publicly beheaded a woman in Islam’s holy city of Mecca, prompting further criticism of the country’s human rights record. Laila Bint Abdul Muttalib Basim, a Burmese woman who resided in Saudi Arabia, was executed by sword on Monday, January 12 after being dragged through the street and held down by four police officers. She was convicted of the sexual abuse and murder of her seven-year-old step-daughter. A video showed how it took three blows to complete the execution, while the woman screamed ‘I did not kill. I did not kill.’ It has now been removed by YouTube as part of its policy on ‘shocking and disgusting content.’” ([The Independent](#))

### **January 23: Lagarde calls King Abdullah ‘advocate of women’ - despite ban on driving**

“Christine Lagarde, the head of the International Monetary Fund, has praised King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia as a ‘strong advocate of women,’ but human rights campaigners said his reign only brought marginal advances for women, while failing to secure fundamental rights of free expression, association, and assembly. In paying tribute to the king who died on January 23 aged 90, Lagarde—who has expressed her concerns over gender inequality—described the monarch as a great leader who implemented many reforms. ‘In a very discreet way, he was a strong advocate of women. It was very gradual, appropriately so probably for the country. I discussed that issue with him several times and he was a strong believer,’ said Lagarde, who is attending the Davos economic forum in Switzerland.” ([The Guardian](#))

## **Syria**

### **January 12: Hayat Boumeddiene, Paris Attacks Suspect, Entered Syria On Jan 8: Turkey's Foreign Minister**

“The suspected female accomplice of Islamist militants behind attacks in Paris was in Turkey five days before the killings and crossed into Syria on Jan. 8, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu was cited as saying on Monday, January 12 by state-run Anatolian news agency. French authorities launched a search for 26-year-old Hayat Boumeddiene after French anti-terrorist police killed her partner Amedy Coulibaly in storming a Jewish supermarket where he had taken hostages. They described her as armed and dangerous. Anatolian, on its website, cited Cavusoglu as saying in an interview she had arrived in Istanbul from Madrid on Jan. 2. Turkey had received no request from Paris to deny her access.” ([Reuters via the Huffington Post](#))

### **January 14: Syria militants execute woman for 'adultery': monitor**

“Al-Qaeda-linked militants have publicly executed a woman accused of adultery in northwestern Syria, a monitoring group said Wednesday, January 14. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that in total 14 people had been executed for alleged adultery or homosexuality in the war-torn country since July, half of them women. It released a video showing fighters from Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, tying up a woman and shooting her in a square in the town of Maaret Masirin in the province of Idlib. A crowd of civilians and fighters are seen watching, as a jihadist accuses the woman of ‘corrupting the earth, and adultery.’” ([AFP via France24](#))

### **January 16: Syrian women and children struggle in Lebanon**

“According to the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a global humanitarian aid organisation, the voices of female refugees have been stifled due to an increasing burden of meeting basic needs. In a recent report drawing on more than 70,000 interviews with female refugees, the IRC found a trend of ‘sexual exploitation and harassment, domestic violence, and early and forced marriage.’ Last year, the UN refugee agency found that more than 145,000 Syrian refugee women were ‘fighting for survival’ and caught in a spiral of poverty, isolation and fear; by the start of this year, local organisations projected that number to surpass 200,000 in Lebanon alone.” ([Al Jazeera](#))

## **Tunisia**

### **January 12: Interview with Tunisia's first female presidential candidate**

“As the fourth anniversary of the Tunisian revolution on 14 January nears, the name of Tunisia’s first female presidential candidate, Kalthoum Kannou, is circulating after she became only the second woman to run for the post in the Maghreb. Kalthoum Kannou, a judge, came 11th out of a total of 27 candidates in the first round of the presidential elections in late November. Veteran politician Beji Caid Essebsi went on to win, but Kannou secured around 18,000 votes in Tunisia, a country that prides itself on being a leader on women’s rights issues in the Arab world. Kanou, who has always said that without the revolution she would not have been able to run, talked to Ahram Online about her experience.” ([Ahram Online](#))

### **January 16: (Op-Ed) Women’s rights in Tunisia: promising future or religio-political game?**


“Women in Tunisia have long enjoyed rights that are very clear on paper. In practice, however, the government’s willingness to enforce these rights seems to depend on the religio-political game of the day.” ([Open Democracy](#))

### **January 23: Essid’s New Government: Nine Women**

“Tunisian Prime Minister Habib Essid announced his appointments for the new Tunisian government’s cabinet positions in a press conference earlier today, January 23. In a press conference held at the presidential palace, Essid explained that ‘women and youth are well represented in this government.’ Although six women were appointed as chief administrators, only three women were given minister positions—Khadija Cherif, Minister of Women, Family and Childhood; Salma Rkik, Minister of Professional Training and Employment; and Latifa Lakhdir, Minister of Culture and Heritage Preservation.” ([Tunisia Live](#))

By Julia Craig Romano

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