

MENA Women News Brief

January 17-January 31, 2017

Egypt

January 22: The girls spearheading roller derby's revival in Egypt

"Egypt is famous for many things, but roller derby isn't one of them. Diab along with her fiercely competitive teammates known as the CaiRollers want to change this. Just 25 girls make up the team created over four years ago -- hardly enough for a sporting revolution -- but the CaiRollers are focused towards a slow and steady track to derby hegemony." ([CNN](#))

January 23: Egypt's new public service mandate has some women wanting more

"A recent decision by Egypt's Ministry of Social Solidarity mandating all youth to complete at least a year's worth of community service has caused a stir among Egyptians, with some even describing it as compulsory civil conscription for women. The decision is the first to impact women in 2017, a year that Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has labeled the 'Year of Women.'" ([Al-Monitor](#))

January 24: Egyptian President Alarmed Over High Divorce Rates

"Egypt's president, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, said Tuesday, January 24 he was alarmed by his country's high divorce rate, suggesting ground-breaking legislation to delegatize divorces verbally declared by Muslim men to their spouses." ([CBS](#))

January 27: Sinai women turn to embroidery to preserve Bedouin culture

"The attire of Bedouin women in Sinai now provides a source of income for women, as the modern creations with traditional embroidery styles are popular with tourists. Amani Ghareeb sensed the threat to the Bedouin culture and heritage when she inherited from her grandparents' traditional Sinai attire. In 2010, she founded Fayrouz Association that assists in the establishment of small projects that help Bedouin women in Sinai make a living. Ghareeb launched the Motiva Sinawi project in order to preserve and develop Bedouin clothing." ([Al-Monitor](#))

January 30: Egyptian women infected with HIV suffer in silence due to social stigma and fear

"Nearly five years ago, when Safaa* was 26 and a mother of two, she discovered that she had HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) -- a disease which destroys the immune system of its host. To her, this was worse than a death sentence -- it would force her to keep her medical history secret from even her closest relatives for the rest of her life." ([Al-Bawaba](#))

Iran

January 23: Could A Hard-Line Woman Challenge Rohani In Iran's Presidential Vote?

"Four months ahead of Iran's presidential election, the absence of a clear challenger to face incumbent Hassan Rohani has led to talk that the gray-bearded clerics who dominate Iran's opaque system might bet on a woman. The political and religious leadership that emerged from the 1979 revolution has so far excluded women from the running for a handful of the most senior posts, including the presidency. With independent polling nearly nonexistent in Iran, it's unclear whether a conservative establishment that gives a woman half the legal standing of a man might actually rally behind a female candidate for president in the May vote." ([Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#))

Iraq

January 26: These Yazidi sisters took up arms to take revenge against ISIS

"After her lucky escape, Khatoon wanted to fight back. This was a crime against humanity, but it was also a crime against women. She thought women should play a role in fighting back. She refused to be a victim. Her solution was to form the first all-female Yazidi fighting battalion. They call themselves the Sun Ladies. The battalion received weapons, training and support from the government of semi-autonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq. They are the first female battalion of the Peshmerga – the Kurdish region's army – which translates to 'those who face death.'" ([PRI](#))

January 30: Yazidi human rights champion banned from coming to Washington to accept award (Op-ed by Josh Rogin)

"In August 2014, Vian Dakhil, the only Yazidi woman in the Iraqi parliament, broke down in tears while pleading publicly for the world to save her people from genocide at the hands of the Islamic State. She was due to travel to Washington next week to be honored for her role as a leading human rights activist. But now, along with millions of other innocent people, she is caught up in the Trump administration's immigration ban." ([Washington Post](#))

Jordan

January 24: Women, children still not equal under the law, women's group says

"The Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) has urged the government to amend several laws which still discriminate against women and children. In a paper presented to the government, the JNCW said that it has presented similar papers to consecutive governments, and every new Parliament. It aims to remind them of laws which need to be amended in order to protect the rights of women and children in Jordan, the JNCW said in a statement issued on Monday, January 23." ([The Jordan Times](#))

Lebanon

January 25: Lebanon's new women's affairs minister fails to charm

"Since the New Year, several Lebanese rights groups have been demanding that the government established by Prime Minister Saad Hariri on December 18 implement a quota of 30 percent of seats for women in the May parliamentary elections. Women's rights organizations had expressed dissatisfaction over the appointment of a man to head the new Ministry for Women's Affairs, Jean Ogasapian. Hariri's newly appointed government is composed of 29 men and one woman, and a ministry for women's affairs was implemented for the first time in Lebanon." ([Al-Monitor](#))

Morocco

January 25: TV channel showing makeup for battered women gets punished

"A public television station in Morocco was given an official reprimand on Tuesday, January 24 for broadcasting a sequence on how to use make-up to conceal the bruises of battered women. It was transmitted last November – marking the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women – by 2M on its morning program 'Sabahiyate.' The sequence depicted a woman with a swollen face, with the presenter telling viewers that she was not really injured, and that these were just 'cinematic effects.'" ([Al-Arabiya English](#))

January 25: Morocco: 66 percent of Sexual Assault Cases against Women Occur in Public Places

"Fifty-three percent of physical assault cases and sixty-six percent of cases of sexual assault against Moroccan women happen in public places, according to a report released by the National Observatory of Violence against Women. Basima Hakkaoui, Minister of Solidarity, Family and Social Development commented on the Observatory's findings on Tuesday, January 24 during a workshop held in Rabat,

titled 'Rabat, a safe city for women.' The Minister emphasized the impact this phenomenon has on all levels of civil society, from the public sector, to international partnerships and organizations." [\(Morocco World News\)](#)

January 27: Moroccan Woman Appointed to Chair US Physics Division

"Moroccan experimental nuclear physicist, Kawtar Hafidi, has been appointed the new Director of the Physics Division (PHY) at the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Argonne National Laboratory. Profiled recently on the Argonne National Laboratory (ANL) website, Hafidi has 17 years of experience leading and conducting fundamental research at major accelerator facilities in the United States and Europe. Currently serving as Associate Chief Scientist for Laboratory-Directed Research & Development (LDRD), Hafidi established transparent processes to support Argonne's most important scientific priorities and assured the possible return on early scientific investment." [\(Morocco World News\)](#)

Saudi Arabia

January 24: 'Lingerie Campaign' Activist on Changing Saudi Culture

"It was a warm summer night in 2008 when Reem Asaad went shopping for undergarments in her home of Saudi Arabia. A banker and university lecturer, Asaad was frustrated, yet not surprised, when she had a less-than-pleasant encounter with the male staff working at the store. That's the experience Asaad identifies today as the one that triggered her to take action." [\(WTTW\)](#)

January 25: In the age of YouTube, what's the point in Saudi Arabia's cinema ban?

"As a filmmaker, I bristled with anticipation. I thought of the day in 2012 when the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts attempted to host a screening of my film 'Wadjda' at a small venue in Riyadh to help it qualify for the Academy Awards. It was the first film ever shot in the Kingdom, and I was so proud to share it with a Saudi audience. But I watched helplessly on social media as bystanders posted videos of bearded men descending on the venue to shut it down." [\(CNN\)](#)

January 21: GE recognized for path-breaking All-Women Business Center in Riyadh

"General Electric has won a prestigious award from the US State Department in recognition for its path-breaking initiative of the All-Women Business Process & IT Services Center in Riyadh. The all-women center is a partnership between GE, Saudi Aramco and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), employing 1,000 women, 600 of them working on projects for GE. Launched in September 2013, the all-women center celebrated the milestone of employing 1,000 women in March 2016, with a target of hiring 3,000 women in the coming years." [\(Al-Arabiya English\)](#)

January 30: Push to change mindset of Saudi women in sports

"When last year Princess Reema Bint Bander was appointed in August to head the new department for women under the General Authority for Sports and its efforts to encourage women to get actively involved in sports, many in the country saw this as an opportunity to act. That's why Maali Al Abdely, the head of Jeddah United, a sports company founded in 2006 in the slightly more liberal Red Sea city, decided it was time to promote sports among women." [\(Gulf News\)](#)

Turkey

January 18: How women pried open the doors to Turkish military schools again

"Just two years ago, Al-Monitor reported on a rise in the number of female soldiers in the Turkish Armed Forces. Then the Ministry of Defense picked a fight by deciding women were no longer needed in the navy and air force. So after having the door slammed in their faces in 2017, potential female

applicants and their families started organizing on social media, particularly those who wanted to apply to the air force." ([Al-Monitor](#))

United Arab Emirates

January 25: Emirati woman astronaut hopes to travel to Mars

"When Alia Al Mansouri grows up, she hopes to become one of the first Emirati astronauts of her generation to travel to Mars. The 14-year-old from Dubai was one of many pupils who attended the Project Space conference yesterday where female scientists and space experts discussed the need for more women in the industry. Of the 537 people who have travelled into space so far, only 60 have been women. But the trend is changing, according to Dr. Sara Al Maeeni, an expert in space communication and research at the Mohammed bin Rashid Space Centre, where 40 per cent of the employees are female." ([The National](#))

January 25: Zahra Lari on how she became the UAE's top figure skater

"The 21-year-old has already made her mark, she says, by becoming the first international-level ice skater to compete wearing the hijab, although today at home with her family, in line with custom, she is not covered. There is still a long way to go in the Gulf, where women are often discouraged from doing sport, Lari says. She has faced opposition from conservative Muslim quarters. 'People see it as dancing for an audience, rather than sport.' Her father and uncles have been lambasted by colleagues. 'They say, "Why do you allow your daughter to do that?"'" ([Financial Times](#))

Yemen

January 20: Is more women entering Yemen's labor market really progress?

"The implications of the war for men are immense, from death at the battlefield to unemployment and the psychological stress of failing to provide for their families. More women are entering the labor market, especially in rural areas where most of the men are day laborers, and becoming the breadwinners of their families. This, of course, enables women in rural areas to assume greater power in the decision-making in their households and also forces the men to participate more in household tasks such as cooking, cleaning and taking care of children." ([Al-Monitor](#))

January 30: Women Killed in Yemen Raid Were Qaeda Fighters, Pentagon Says

"Female fighters were among the roughly 14 Qaeda militants killed in an American commando raid in central Yemen over the weekend, the Pentagon said on Monday, January 30, seeking to explain a number of reports that civilians died in the nearly hour-long firefight. 'There were a lot of female combatants who were part of this,' he said. 'We saw during this operation as it was taking place that female fighters ran to pre-established positions as though they'd been trained to be ready and trained to be combatants.'" ([New York Times](#))

Regional

January 22: Female empowerment is alive in the Middle East, as Women's March takes place across the region

"Saturday's 'Women's March' saw thousands of protestors united across the world, demonstrating against newly inaugurated US President Trump while promoting the issue of women's rights. Four official sister marches were organised in Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Israel, sharing in the universal Women's March message: 'Women's rights are human rights.'" ([Al-Bawaba](#))

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