

MENA Women News Brief

January 19, 2016-February 2, 2016

Algeria

January 26: Tuareg women-only musical tradition reborn in Algeria

“Women have long played the imzad in the matriarchal Tuareg communities of the Haggar and Tassili mountains of southern Algeria and neighboring desert regions of Niger and Mali. But by the early 2000s, only two women in Algeria still played the unique instrument crafted out of half a gourd shell covered in animal skin, a wooden handle and a string of horse hair. But today, dozens of young women are again learning how to use an arched bow to stroke the imzad's string in three schools in the vast Haggar region.” ([Al Arabiya](#))

February 2: New law in Algeria punishes violence against women

“A new Algerian law came into effect this week punishing violence against women and sexual harassment, in a victory for feminist groups that had fought for years for the legislation. The law, effective from Monday, February 1, had been blocked by the Senate for eight months amid resistance from conservative Muslims who view it as interference in family affairs.” ([CBS News](#))

Egypt

January 31: ‘Worth 100 Girls’: Social campaign calls attention to women with unique career paths

“Three institutions, Akhbarak.net, Itfarrag and Entreprenelle launched their campaign, called ‘B 100 Bint’ or ‘Worth 100 Girls,’ aiming to empower Egyptian women and help them face the challenges and the struggle to be independent and to shape a better life for themselves. The project includes 15 inspiring stories of women who earn their living in defiance of traditional gender roles, breaking free of social constraints and taboos. The campaign presents women who continue to pave the way to progress, despite the many hardships that society throws at them.” ([Daily News Egypt](#))

February 1: Does Egypt's Law Protect 'Short-Term Brides' Or Formalize Trafficking?

“Egypt has an unusual law known as the ‘seasonal marriage’ law, and the government says it's aimed at helping the many poor families who resort to selling their daughters into temporary or long-term marriages with wealthy, older foreign men to support themselves. Egypt's Justice Ministry says it will begin strictly enforcing that law, which requires foreign men—usually from Gulf countries—to pay to marry women 25 years or more their junior. Human rights groups say the law formalizes sex trafficking and bolsters a business that preys on the poor and the vulnerable.” ([NPR](#))

Iran

February 1: Women’s rock climbing gains foothold in Iran

“In the mountains of northwestern Iran, Farnaz Esmailzadeh clings to a sheer rock face, ignoring the dizzying height and icy wind as she searches for the next handhold. The 27-year-old, who has been rock climbing since she was 13, has distinguished herself in international competitions despite the barriers she faces as a female athlete in conservative Iran. Gyms in the Islamic Republic, including the facility where she practices on an artificial climbing wall, have separate and limited hours for women. Rock climbers, like other female athletes, must adhere to the country's conservative dress code by wearing long, loose garments and covering their hair.” ([U.S. News & World Report](#))

Iraq

January 30: Life in Iraq: War Forces Women into New Roles

“Violence gripping Iraq has cast the country's women into roles of providers and protectors. Though ISIS has subjected women to horrific abuse and enslavement, life in government-held areas often proves to be simply the lesser of two evils. ‘Women have become doubly victimized, [first] by ISIS and then by the local culture,’ said activist Yanar Mohammed. ‘Whether you are Sunni, Shia, whether you submit to ISIS or you submit to your patriarch in Iraq ... there is absolutely no protection for women.’ NBC News spoke to several to shed light on their struggles. Here are five of their stories.” ([NBC News](#))

January 31: Yazidi sex slaves freed from Daesh forced to undergo virginity tests

“Tortured Yazidi women and girls, who managed to escape the brutality of Islamic State (ISIS) militants, had to face further humiliation, allegedly by Kurdish officials. The rescued women were forced to undergo virginity tests, which according to the World Health Organization (WHO) has ‘no scientific validity.’ A UN report has estimated that 3,500 people – mainly Yazidi women and young girls – were being kept as sex slaves by ISIS (Daesh) in Iraq.” ([International Business Times](#))

Israel

January 21: Ya'alon: No Reason Why a Woman Shouldn't Be Defense Minister

“There is no reason why a woman could not, or should not, become a defense minister in Israel, said the country’s current holder of that title, Moshe Ya'alon. Israel has long been one of the few countries in the world with a mandatory military service for women – female soldiers make up over 30 percent of the IDF’s recruits, and over 50 percent of the military’s officers. It was not until 2000 that women in Israel were given the right to serve in combat roles, and even since then, their rise in the ranks and their integration has proved a slow process.” ([Haaretz](#))

January 31: Historic deal allows men and women to pray together at Western Wall

“A battle lasting more than a quarter of a century over the Western Wall, the religious site revered by Jews all over the world, has resulted in a historic deal to create a space where men and women are permitted to pray together in equality. On Sunday, January 31, the Israeli government approved the creation of a permanent and official separate area for mixed gender praying at the site in Jerusalem’s Old City. Liberal and reform Jews hailed the move as a victory for Jews everywhere.” ([The Guardian](#))

Palestinian Territories

January 29: Palestinian women increasingly targeted online

“The rise in social media in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has been accompanied by an increase in cybercrime. Cybercrimes typically involve blackmail, defamation and hacking into social media accounts and credit card information. Many Palestinian women and girls who have been subjected to blackmail or other online threats are reluctant to file complaints with the police given that the situation typically involves a sensitive matter, which can be intimidating in a conservative society.” ([Al Monitor](#))

Syria

January 20: Women must be at the peace table for a chance of ending war in Syria (Op-ed by Fiona Hodgson)

“With devastating conflicts raging in so many countries, creating a more peaceful and stable world has to be top of everyone’s New Year resolutions. Yet the voices of half the population of these countries

are ignored, as women are excluded from the peace table. In earlier talks on Syria, Syrian women were ignored. From the picture of the Vienna peace process on Syria in October – where 18 men and one woman sat round the table – nothing seems to have changed.” ([The Guardian](#))

January 27: Another Kind of Girl (Op-ed by Khaldiya)

“When I arrived at the Za’atari refugee camp in Jordan three years ago, I was overwhelmed. My family left our village in the region of Syria where the revolution began, after the area was bombed. Now I am sharing my experiences in this Op-Doc video, which I made through a media workshop at an activity center in the camp in 2014, working with a visiting filmmaker to film as much of my life as I could.” ([New York Times](#))

January 28: ISIS arrests dozens of women in Syria’s Jarablus for violating ‘Sharia dress code’

“Extremists of the Islamic State (ISIS) launched an arrest campaign in Syria’s northern city of Jarablus on Wednesday, January 27, targeting women accused of violating the dress code imposed by the radical group. Local activists and eyewitnesses confirmed that ISIS militants have detained more than 30 women in Jarablus on charges of violating the Sharia dress.” ([ARA News](#))

January 28: Syrian women share stories of resilience

“The UN talks on Syria are due to begin in Geneva on Friday, January 29 and an often overlooked aspect of the conflict has been its disproportionate effect on women, who have been caught in a cycle of violence and displacement. More than 50 percent of the registered Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan are women. Women living as refugees in Lebanon reflect on losing love, homes and, in some instances, their sense of themselves.” ([Al Jazeera](#))

January 29: With few men left in Syria, women run the show

“The military draft has visibly emptied Damascus from its young male population. Almost overnight, young able-bodied men aged 18-40 fled the country to avoid service in the Syrian Army. Most went to Lebanon and Turkey by bus or Europe via ‘death boats.’ Back home, the city has been transformed into a ‘female-only’ society—at least for now. This drain has forced Syrian women to venture into fields that were once restricted only to men.” ([Gulf News](#))

February 1: Syrian refugee women in Lebanon face heightened risk of exploitation and sexual harassment

“Shortfalls in international assistance and discriminatory policies imposed by the Lebanese authorities are creating conditions that facilitate the exploitation and abuse of women refugees in Lebanon, said Amnesty International in a new report. The report, ‘I Want a Safe Place’: Refugee Women from Syria Uprooted and Unprotected in Lebanon, highlights how the Lebanese government’s refusal to renew residency permits for refugees and a shortage of international funding, leaves refugee women in a precarious position, and puts them at risk of exploitation by people in positions of power including landlords, employers and even the police.” ([Amnesty International](#))

Turkey

January 19: Discussion of Turkish government reforms to enhance women's empowerment begins in Parliament

“Parliament convened Tuesday, January 19 to begin talks on reforms that introduce new rights and incentives for working mothers. One of the prioritized draft bills aims to better women's empowerment.

The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) previously indicated that women's employment rate increasing to 35 percent of the workforce was part of its 2023 goals, and it had further underlined that women's employment will allow Turkey to become the world's 10th largest global economy by 2023.” ([Daily Sabah](#))

January 23: Women, young hit most by unemployment in Turkey

“The official average rate of unemployment in Turkey hovers at around 10 percent, but youth unemployment has firmly stayed at the 18-20 percent mark, where both uneducated youths and young college graduates alike are having difficulties finding work. According to a study released in August by the research institute of the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Unions (DİSK), unemployment is most prevalent among young women.” ([Today's Zaman](#))

United Arab Emirates

January 20: UAE's first woman airline service

“The UAE has become the first country in the world to launch an all-woman operated airline services company. Speaking to GN Guides, Company CEO Emmanuel Dubuisson said he set up the firm in order to cater to the more conservative families in the region, as well as women that just like the idea of a women-only service. This service will not be available to male clients.” ([Gulf News](#))

January 31: Woman is first past the post in Sharjah's historic election

“Fatima Al Muhairi became the first elected member of the historic Sharjah Council when she beat five men in the seat of Al Hamriya. Ms. Al Muhairi won 33 per cent of the 406 votes cast. Sixty-seven per cent of registered voters in all turned out for the first local election – and 42 per cent of them were women. A total of 16,696 Sharjah citizens cast their ballots during the four days of voting. In some areas the turnout percentage was even higher, such as in Al Mleiha, where 87 per cent of 854 cast their vote.” ([The National](#))

Yemen

January 21: 5,000 women protest in Yemen against Saudi-led airstrikes, civilian deaths

“Thousands of Yemeni women took to the streets of Sanaa on Thursday, January 21 to protest against the Saudi-led coalition airstrikes on the war-torn country. Carrying banners and chanting slogans, some 4,000 women from the capital denounced the airstrikes and the UN for failing to protect civilians and end the war. ‘We came out today to condemn the crimes committed by Al Saud and the Saudi regime against the Yemeni people for the past 10 months and to denounce all these crimes that are committed against the Yemeni people,’ said protester Shayma al Dailami.” ([NRT](#))

General

January 20: Women Can Move the Middle East Beyond Oil (Op-ed by Victoria Bateman)

“Throughout the Middle East, the plunge in oil prices is creating economic shock waves. The Middle East must start to contemplate life beyond oil; and that will require an economic model which, as in the West, depends on technologically-driven economic growth. However, the Middle East will need more than markets if it is to compete in the modern day technological race. It took two additional factors for the West to push ahead of the rest of the world a little more than two centuries ago: the Enlightenment and the empowerment of women. The state and religion will need to allow for greater freedom and tolerance. And the situation facing women will require a radical transformation.” ([Bloomberg](#))

January 25: Arab women's sports witnessing remarkable progress

“Nada Al Naqbi, Deputy Head of the Supreme Organizing Committee for the Arab Women Sports Tournament (AWST), has said Arab women’s sports are witnessing remarkable progress in various Arab countries, marking a new phase of real development towards advancing their performance to the level of professionalism that enables them to compete globally. The third Arab Women Sports Tournament (AWST 2016) will take place in Sharjah from February 2nd -12th.” ([Al Bawaba](#))

Special Feature

January 29: Talking about Tehran on Capitol Hill should not be a boys’ club (Op-ed by Suzanne Maloney)

“Where it mattered most—in the Congressional debate over the deal and U.S. policy toward Iran—nearly all of the people doing the talking about U.S. policy toward Tehran were men. Women led the negotiations on the Iran deal; they covered every minute of the tortuous talks in the press; they debated the terms of the deal within academia and think tanks throughout the United States, Europe, and even Iran; they published thoughtful, informed analyses, both pro and con, that addressed everything from sanctions to proliferation risks to human rights to legislative procedure. Women played pivotal roles in shaping the legislative outcome to the deal. But when it came time to advise Congress on its fateful deliberations over Iran, women were almost entirely absent.” ([Brookings Institution](#))

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