

MENA Women's News Brief

January 26, 2015-February 9, 2015

January 27: Op-Ed: Arab women shaping 21st century (Shaikha Jawaher Bint Mohammad Al Oasimi, UNHCR's first Eminent Advocate)

“Our region is home to women who become role models to others. From the teenage Syrian refugee girl in Jordan who must now act as a mother for her orphaned brothers to the women entrepreneurs of Yemen, who started their business with nothing but big dreams to the women of Sharjah, who have shown that they can be modern Arab women while also celebrating their cultural roots. Previously, women had a glass ceiling imposed on them, limiting how high they could rise on the corporate ladder. But education is the hammer that has shattered that ceiling.” ([Gulf News](#))

February 4: The Woman Who Sold Her Baby For \$435 To Buy Firewood

“Last week in the northern Afghan province of Balkh, an impoverished mother chose the only option she felt was left to her, after her drug-addicted husband abandoned her. She had to care by herself for five young children and an elderly father. So she sold her 1-month-old infant for money—the equivalent of about \$435 in American currency—to buy kindling wood to keep her four other children from freezing in the harsh winter weather.” ([NPR](#))

Egypt

January 29: Women Rally in Cairo to Demand Investigation Into Protester Deaths

“Female protesters gathered in downtown Cairo on Thursday, January 29 demanding an investigation into the deaths of activist Shaimaa Sabbagh and others they say were killed by Egyptian security forces around the anniversary of the 2011 uprising. Sabbagh was killed during a march on the eve of the January 25 anniversary and another 25 men and women were killed on Sunday, January 25 in demonstrations commemorating the onset of the popular revolt that toppled veteran autocrat Hosni Mubarak.” ([Reuters](#))

February 6: In Egypt, social pressure means FGM is still the norm

“Awataf Mohamed Ali’s son lies fast asleep on her lap, but her 10-year-old daughter, Shahd, is very much awake. In fact, she looks horrified. Ali has just explained that in just 18 months’ time, if she can find a doctor willing to help, Shahd will probably be subjected to female genital mutilation. It is a similar story across much of the country: in 2008, UNICEF estimated that 91 percent of married Egyptian women aged between 15 and 49 had been mutilated—72 percent of them by doctors.” ([The Guardian](#))

Iran

January 27: Iranian women managers rising 10 percent annually: vice president

“The number of women managers is increasing about 10 percent annually in Iran, Vice President for Women and Family Affairs Shahindokht Mollaverdi said on Sunday, January 25. She also said a bill to increase women managers is under consideration by the government, IRNA reported. Mollaverdi called on all three branches of government and NGOs to help empower female managers.” ([Tehran Times](#))

January 28: Iran to let foreign women watch men's volleyball tournament

“Iran will allow foreign women watch men play volleyball when it hosts an international championship this year, but Iranian women will still be banned, the state news agency said on Wednesday, January 28. ‘Foreign women as employees of embassies, the families of foreign teams or other foreign women living in Tehran are permitted to attend the men's volleyball competitions,’ the head of Iran’s Volleyball Federation, Mahmoud Afshardoust, told the IRNA news agency.” ([Reuters](#))

February 6: Rouhani VP voices frustration with administration

“Iran’s Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, Shahindokht Molaverdi, criticized the administration’s lack of attention to opportunities for women to play an active role in society and her own lack of executive authority to implement changes. At a meeting in Isfahan, speaking to a special working group on women’s issues, Molaverdi criticized the administration’s Sixth Development Plan, saying, ‘In these plans, the religious and legal demands of women ... in getting away from poverty, corruption and discrimination must be considered. The time has come that women must fulfill their share in the ... development prospects.’” ([Al-Monitor](#))

Iraq

February 5: Document reveals what ISIS really expects from female recruits living in Syria and Iraq

“ISIS has released a manifesto detailing the role of women in the jihadist group - stating it is ‘legitimate’ for girls to be married to fighters at the age of nine and emphasising their role as wives, mothers and homemakers. The 10,000-word manifesto, uploaded by the all-female Al-Khanssaa Brigade’s media wing on to popular jihadist forums, existed only in Arabic until it was discovered and translated by Charlie Winter, a researcher on jihadism in Syria and Iraq at the counter extremism think-tank the Quilliam Foundation.” ([The Independent](#))
The text for the document can be found [here](#).

February 8: Vian Dakhil: Iraq’s only female Yazidi MP on the battle to save her people

“Vian Dakhil is one of only two Yazidis in Iraq’s parliament. It seems obvious that it’s a lonely job; she’s also the only woman from the besieged minority in an assembly that is three-quarters male. (The other Yazidi politician, a man, is so inactive that few people seem to know he exists.) But I don’t realise how lonely her job is until I’ve spent a 14-hour day with her in northern Iraq, visiting Yazidi survivors of ISIS carnage. It’s a relentless marathon of inhaling dust, kissing babies, and comforting catastrophically traumatised, grief-wracked refugees.” ([The Guardian](#))

Israel

January 29: Israeli city told to pay women damages after failing to remove ‘modesty signs’

“Four female campaigners have been awarded damages in a groundbreaking case in an Israeli court, after their local municipality refused to remove illegal and threatening signs demanding women wear ‘modest’ clothing in public. The case marks the first time that campaigners against gender segregation in Israel’s ultra-orthodox Jewish communities have persuaded a court to rule against the so-called ‘modesty signs’ – despite that they were deemed unlawful by the attorney general two years ago. Judge David Gidoni found that the failure of the local authority in the city of Beit Shemesh to take down the signs violated the women’s civil rights.” ([The Guardian](#))

Jordan

February 4: Jordan executes Sajida al-Rishawi after pilot murder

“Jordan has executed by hanging Sajida al-Rishawi, a jailed Iraqi woman militant, whose release had been demanded by ISIS a security source said on Wednesday, February 4. The execution occurred the day after the killing of the Jordanian pilot Moaz al-Kasasbeh captured by ISIS was announced on Tuesday, February 3. Al-Rishawi was sentenced to death for her role in a 2005 suicide bomb attack that killed 60 people.” ([Al-Arabiya](#))

Lebanon

January 26: Arrest in Lebanon sheds light on life of Islamic State leader’s ex-wife, Saja al-Dulaimi

“The investigation into Saja al-Dulaimi, the ex-wife of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, has shed light on the murky ways in which Islamist militias move funds through the Middle East. It has also illustrated how the families of Syrian and Iraqi militants are quietly settling in Lebanon, hiding in refugee camps and the occasional Christian village. And it has yielded an intriguing profile of a woman in the jihadist world.” ([Washington Post](#))

Oman

February 7: Why are Omani women still on Shura Council sidelines?

“As the Majlis Al Shura readies for the eighth term election expected this year, women are asking themselves what it would take to be elected on a male-dominated council. There is only one woman in the current 84-member Shura Council. No woman was elected in 2007 from among 21 registered candidates. The best year for women was 2003 when two got the voters' nod and many thought it would get better but it did not.” ([Times of Oman](#))

Saudi Arabia

January 26: (Op-Ed) Women’s Rights in Saudi Arabia After King Abdullah (Catherine Powell)

“The death of Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz raises important questions about the future of the kingdom, including issues that have ripple effects around the world such as regional relations, counterterrorism strategy, and international oil pricing. With the transition of power to King Salman, another question emerges: what does the future hold for Saudi women’s rights?” ([Council on Foreign Relations Development Channel](#))

February 1: Saudi frees women's rights activist close to blogger

“A woman who co-founded the Saudi Liberal Network Internet discussion group with blogging activist Raef Badawi has been freed after about three months in prison, her daughter said on Sunday, February 6. Suad al-Shammari had spent around 90 days at a women's prison in the Red Sea city of Jeddah, her daughter Sarah al-Rimaly told AFP.” ([The Lebanon Daily Star](#))

Syria

February 4: 'I couldn't sit and do nothing': the women saving lives in Syria

“As barrel bombs rain down on the Syrian city of Idlib, Hasnaa Shawaf and her team spring into action. Armed only with basic tools and medical kits, they are first responders for the Syria Civil Defence, a volunteer organisation training the country’s newest generation of search and rescue workers. “I desperately wanted to help,” says Shawaf. ‘I couldn’t just sit and do nothing.’ Shawaf was working as a math teacher in her hometown of Maaret al-Numan when she heard about the Syria Civil Defence.” ([The Guardian](#))

Tunisia

February 4: Essid Picks Eight Women for Cabinet Jobs

“The new cabinet announced Monday, February 2 by Tunisian Prime Minister Habib Essid includes eight female members, three ministers and five secretaries of state. The three ministers are Selma Elloumi Rekik as Minister of Tourism, Latifa Lakhdar as Minister of Culture, and Samira Merai Friâa as Minister of Women’s Affairs. The five state secretaries are Boutheina Yaghlane, Lamia Zeribi, Amal Azouz, Amel Nafti, and Majdouline Cherni. The new cabinet is made up of 26 ministers, a secretary-general of the government and 14 secretaries of state.” ([All Africa](#))

Europe’s first academic centre to combat the brutality faced by women in warzones has been opened in London on Tuesday, February 10 by Angelina Jolie, a special envoy for the UN high commissioner for refugees (UNHCR). She called for “the empowerment of women to be the highest priority for the finest minds, in the best academic institutions.” She said students of the centre on women, peace and security at the London School of Economics (LSE) had the chance to change the world. ([The Guardian](#))

By Julia Craig Romano



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