

# MENA Women News Brief

January 3-January 17, 2017

## **Egypt**

### **January 12: Egypt court ruling upholds decision to freeze assets of women's rights activists**

"An Egyptian court has upheld an earlier ruling to freeze the assets of three prominent rights activists, the latest chapter in a widening government crackdown against civil society groups. The verdict targeted Mozn Hassan and her organisation, Nazra for Feminist Studies, as well as Mohammed Zaraa and Atef Hafez, both of the Arab Organisation for Criminal Reform." ([The Guardian](#))

### **January 15: Civil society bears the burden of fighting sexual harassment in Egypt**

"...Despite the presence of such provisions, 99.3 percent of women in Egypt are reported to have been sexually harassed. Civil society has stepped in, encouraging women to speak up and urging men to take a stance. 'Even if we have the most progressive law and the most progressive policy in the world and people do not think of sexual harassment as a crime, then we are not really doing anything,' said Alia Soliman, the communications manager at HarassMap." ([Al-Monitor](#))

### **January 16: My body is not a source of shame. I have nothing to regret about this video (Ghadeer Ahmed)**

"Six years since the uprising, women in Egypt are still fighting for our rights. Our bodies are controlled by wider society in both public and private spaces. 'Honour' is still judged to rest upon women's conduct and sexual activity. So we are inhibited from publicly expressing our sexuality and bodily autonomy. This context means that a woman's private life can be used against her if someone threatens to make it public. The online world is now a battlefield for women struggling for their right to privacy." ([The Guardian](#))

## **Iran**

### **January 13: Iranian Women Arrested for Riding Motorcycle; Video Fuels Backlash**

"Iranian police have arrested two women for riding a motorcycle in a western city – an incident that went viral when images appeared online and sparked a social-media backlash against the country's political and religious authorities." ([VOA](#))

### **January 16: Q&A: Iranian chess player Sara Khadem**

"Sarasadat Khademalsharieh, better known as Sara Khadem, is a 19-year-old chess player from Iran who holds the titles of International Master and Woman Grandmaster. Like most other chess players, Khadem took up chess at an early age. She was eight when she first touched a chess board. Four years later, she was a world champion, winning the under-12 world championships." ([AlJazeera](#))

## **Iraq**

### **January 5: Iraqi Rescue Center For Yazidi Women Enslaved By Islamic State Closed**

"The closure of Yazda, a charity providing treatment to traumatized Yazidi women rescued from the extremist Islamic State (IS) group in Iraq, is damaging their chances of recovery, the charity's head said on January 4. Yazda's executive director Murad Ismael said its offices were shut down on January 2 by Kurdish authorities who accused the group of being illegally involved in 'political activities.'" ([Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#))

### **January 11: Survey: 2 million women widowed or divorced in Iraq**

"Near continuous violence, absence of government assistance and a social fabric that is spiralling out of control has made Iraq's women face some of the highest divorce rates in the world, as a frightening number of them are widowed daily due to the ongoing Iraqi government offensive to recapture Mosul from Daesh." ([Middle East Monitor](#))

### **January 15: Court set up near Mosul to confer Iraqi IDs on refugees with ISIS-issued documents**

"...That is one of the reasons why the High Juridical Council in Baghdad decided to open this office in the camp last December, explains assistant judge Mohammed Fawzi, who is behind a desk in one of the cabins. 'We do not recognize any of the documents that Daesh issued to the people during the two years of its occupation,' he says, using the local name for ISIS. For official and certified documentations of marriage, birth, divorce, and death, IDPs until recently would have to connect to the court offices in Shekhan that cover Mosul since the ISIS took control in mid-2014." ([Rudaw](#))

### **January 17: Iraqis who escaped Islamic State grapple with trauma**

"Nearby camps are full of civilians displaced from in and around Mosul and many suffer from depression and anxiety disorders, aid groups say. 'I feel lost, my life has no meaning anymore,' said Laila. 'If your car is stolen, you can buy another one. If your house is destroyed you can build another one. But a life cannot be replaced.' She is taking psychotropic medication and attends weekly counseling sessions run by aid group Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), but she says nothing helps." ([Reuters](#))

## **Israel**

### **January 11: In landmark decision, High Court rules for Women's Western Wall prayer**

"In a landmark High Court decision Wednesday, January 11, the state was given 30 days to find 'good cause' why a woman may not read aloud from a Torah scroll as part of prayer services at the Western Wall. The sweeping decision, jointly addressing three petitions on related topics, ruled that assuming the government cannot find 'good cause,' not only may women read from the Torah at the Western Wall, but also that the government may no longer argue that the Robinson's Arch area of the plaza constitutes 'access to the Western Wall.'" ([Times of Israel](#))

### **January 15: In Israel, Calls to Up Enforcement of Anti-polygamy Laws**

"Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit on Sunday, January 15 called on Israel's authorities to increase enforcement of the laws concerning polygamy. Although the practice is officially a criminal offense in Israel with a five-year prison sentence, indictments are rarely served in practice. Polygamy is most prevalent among Israel's Bedouin community, with some 36 percent of the community in polygamous relationships, according to police data. A recent report on Channel 10 claimed that a number of Israeli rabbis affiliated with the Chief Rabbinate allowed some Orthodox Jewish men to take a second wife." ([Haaretz](#))

## **Libya**

### **January 8: Libya prepares to deport IS women to their origin countries**

"The spokesman of the Special Deterrent Force (SDF) Ahmed Salim, said they have filed a case at the Attorney General's Office including the number and names of the women arrested on charges of terrorism so that they be readied for deportation to their countries of origin. 'Most of the women are from Tunisia and their country has not yet contacted us about their cases.' Salim indicated." ([Libya Observer](#))

### **January 9: Why are women not included in Peacebuilding efforts? (Jessica Neuwirth)**

“Despite the intense and sustained suffering experienced by Libyan people, political interests continue to be prioritized over their well-being and security. Libyan women and local communities are particularly at risk, but their involvement has been effectively excluded at almost every level, meaning decisions made at meetings like this one are unlikely to be effective. Individuals and front-line groups have repeatedly stated that they will not accept ‘top-down solutions’ imposed on them during discussions from which they have been excluded.” ([The Toronto Star](#))

### **Morocco**

#### **January 10: Morocco 'bans the sale and production of the burka'**

“Morocco has banned the sale, production and import of the burka, according to local reports. Letters announcing the ban were sent out on Monday, January 9, giving businesses 48 hours to get rid of their stock, the reports stated. There was no official announcement from the government, but unnamed officials told outlets the decision was made due to ‘security concerns.’ It is unclear if Morocco is now intending to ban the garment outright. A high-ranking interior ministry official confirmed the ban to the Le360 news site, adding that ‘bandits have repeatedly used this garment to perpetrate their crimes.’” ([BBC News](#))

### **Saudi Arabia**

#### **January 16: The Saudi women afraid to go home**

“Arwa initially came to the US as a student before returning to Saudi Arabia to work for several years. There she says her parents began to turn on her as she began questioning the restrictions placed on women in Saudi society. Her frustrations grew to the point that one night she sneaked out of her family home and arranged to travel across the border to Bahrain, where she boarded a flight to begin her journey to the US. Leaving her home and Saudi Arabia were against the wishes of her father, who is also her legal guardian, and doing either could have landed her in jail.” ([CNN](#))

### **Syria**

#### **January 4: Female Kurdish fighters announce new training academies for Arab women to take on ISIS in Syria**

“The Kurdish Women’s Protection Units (YPJ) in Syria is both widening its operations to include Arab women who want to join the fight against ISIS and stepping up its military assault on the extremists’ de facto capital of Raqqa in 2017, a spokesperson has said. ‘As the women of the YPJ, we aim not only liberation from Isis but also a liberation of mentality and thoughts,’ the YPJ’s spokesperson Nesrin Abdullah announced.” ([Independent](#))

#### **January 13: UN agencies assess dire hygiene, protection needs for women in Syria’s war-ravaged Aleppo**

“The health, hygiene and protection needs of women and girls displaced in Aleppo are staggering, the United Nations has observed, voicing concern for civilians in the Syrian city that has endured intense fighting for about four years. ‘The destruction is beyond imagination,’ described Ruba Farah, security assistant at the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), who accompanied an interagency convoy to eastern Aleppo from 1 to 12 January. ‘Schools, hospitals, roads and houses were destroyed.’” ([UN News Agency](#))

#### **January 17: Syrian women in Egypt find solidarity in stylist classes**

“Sponsored since 2014 by WATAN, a local nongovernmental organization, Nariman Hood – a middle-aged Syrian beauty specialist – has been passing on her knowledge and skills to other Syrian women in

Cairo. "The initiative began with the intention of helping [women] find work opportunities. The idea was to teach [them] a dignified profession that could become a source of income for them in Egypt," Hood told Al-Monitor." ([Al-Monitor](#))

## **Tunisia**

### **January 13: Tunisian official slams French presidential candidate's comments about women's status**

"A senior Tunisian official has strongly criticised French presidential candidate and former Prime Minister Manuel Valls for his remarks about the status of women in Tunisia. Anouar Gharbi warned of the 'growing French intervention in Tunisia's internal affairs' after Valls was reported as saying that women in the North African state 'are forced to wear hijab, like in Iran.'" ([Middle East Monitor](#))

## **Turkey**

### **January 16: Turkish grannies to get state salaries for grandchildren's care**

"Child care is the biggest challenge for working mothers, but the Turkish government has found an easy solution: pay grandmothers to look after the children. Turkish law requires workplaces, both public and private, to provide child care facilities for their employees, but most establishments do not comply with the rules to avoid additional costs. Instead of fulfilling their responsibilities, they prefer to pay fines." ([Al-Monitor](#))

## **United Arab Emirates**

### **January 5: For UAE's women-owned business, possibilities are within reach**

"Setting up a successful business and working for yourself is the dream career for many, but a combination of innovation, vision, organisation and trusting your instinct is what makes a successful entrepreneur. Women in the UAE are leading entrepreneurship into a new era of enrichment as more come forward to turn their ideas into triumphant business models. According to the UAE Ministry of Economy, women contribute nearly half of the UAE's SME sector. The importance of a woman's role in society, politics, education, and business has garnered increasing recognition in recent years." ([Gulf News](#))

### **January 18: Dubai Business Women Council Launches Partnership with United Nations**

"The Dubai Business Women Council (DBWC), the official representative organisation for professional business women and female entrepreneurs working in Dubai, has partnered with the United Nations (UN), it announced at a press conference on Monday, January 16. The partnership is designed to support the UAE's drive for greater female participation in the workforce, in line with the UN Women Empowerment Principles." ([Gulf News](#))

## **Yemen**

### **January 16: Yemeni women who campaigned for female literacy shot dead**

"A charity worker who campaigned for female emancipation in Yemen has been shot dead in an assassination attempt that has left other activists in the city of Taiz fearing for their own safety. Amat al-Aleem al-Asbahi, who worked to improve female literacy in the war-torn country, was killed on 25 December by two motorcycle riders as she walked on a busy street in the city centre." ([Independent](#))

### **January 17: Female Yemeni soldiers protest as war claims 10,000 civilians**

"Yemeni female fighters took to the streets carrying their toddlers, rocket launchers and machine guns to send a powerful message to the Saudi-led coalition who have played a part in a two-year war that has claimed 10,000 civilian lives. A day earlier, a UN envoy held talks with Yemen's President



Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi in an attempt to return to a ceasefire and for political talks to end the brutal conflict.” ([Daily Mail](#))

### **Regional**

#### **January 2017: Human Rights Watch: World Report**

“World Report 2017 is Human Rights Watch’s 27th annual review of human rights practices around the globe. It summarizes key human rights issues in more than 90 countries and territories worldwide, drawing on events from late 2015 through November 2016.”

Every country in the MENA Region is profiled in this report. The report can be accessed here:

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017>

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