

# **MENA Women News Brief**

**January 5, 2016-January 19, 2016**

## **Egypt**

### **January 6: The young woman slain by Islamic State for daring to 'swim in a sea of dreams'**

“Ruqia Hassan dared to defy ISIS in its stronghold of Raqqa, Syria. She seemed to sense that one day she would pay with her life for her words and prayers. She was right. According to the social media accounts of citizen journalists from Raqqa, Hassan was killed sometime late last year. But ISIS only informed her family of her death this week, saying she had been ‘executed’ for ‘espionage.’ It's believed to be the first time that ISIS has killed a female citizen journalist in Syria.” ([Egypt Independent](#))

### **January 18: Does Egypt’s new tourist marriage law really ‘protect women?’ (Op-ed by Sonia Farid)**

“Egypt’s new tourist marriage law requires a foreign man marrying an Egyptian woman, 25 or more years younger than him, to deposit 50,000 Egyptian pounds (\$6,383) in his future wife’s name. The law is directed at non-Egyptian men vacationing in the country who marry girls much younger than their age. While the law is officially being presented as a means to protect the wife’s financial rights, should the husband make the marriage temporary, a large number of activists and rights groups see it as facilitating a disguised form of human trafficking. As the law is not entirely new, but a modification of an older one, it raises questions about the issue.” ([Al Arabiya](#))

### **January 18: How one Coptic woman made Egyptian parliamentary history**

“Becoming a member of parliament as the first Coptic woman to win an individual seat representing a district known for its tribalism and intolerance was a difficult feat. Mona Gaballah succeeded in entering the annals of Egyptian parliamentary history as the first Coptic woman to represent the al-Jamaliah and Manshiyat Nasser district. In an interview with Al-Monitor, Gaballah talks about the hurdles she faced during the electoral race, which includes society’s prevailing patriarchal culture where even women refuse to vote for other women.” ([Al Monitor](#))

## **Iran**

### **January 6: Women’s rights activists in Iran increasingly face jail time amid cultural crackdown**

“The Iranian government has been scaling back women’s rights for decades, despite the fact that Iran was once at the forefront of women’s rights in the region. But there has been constant pushback from Iranian women.” ([New York Times](#))

### **January 13: The Woman Shaping Iran’s Oil Future**

“Elham Hassanzadeh, 31, wrote the book on Iran’s natural gas industry since the 1979 Islamic revolution. She has returned to Iran to head a consulting firm, Energy Pioneers, based in Tehran and London, that’s at the vanguard of Iran’s all-out push to lure back foreign investors after the expected lifting of sanctions in coming months. Hassanzadeh is building a business by parlaying a deep knowledge of Iran’s energy resources, close ties to government technocrats and industry leaders in Tehran, and high-level contacts at major oil companies, law firms, and investment houses in the West.” ([Bloomberg](#))

### **January 18: Fed-up Iranian women organize to take more seats in parliament**

“Rights activists believe the lopsided gender imbalance of the Iranian parliament is one reason why so many discriminatory laws against women have been passed by the current legislature, in office since 2012. Ahead of the upcoming Feb. 26 parliamentary elections, a group of women's rights activists organized Changing the Male-Dominated Face of the Parliament, a campaign to address the dearth of women in the legislature. The campaign criticizes incumbent female members of parliament's failure to pursue women's rights and also encourages Iranian women to participate in the next elections as candidates as well as voters.” ([Al Monitor](#))

## **Iraq**

### **January 5: Iraq nominates Yezidi woman Nadia Murad for Nobel Prize**

“Nadia Murad, a Yezidi woman who escaped the clutches of Islamic State (ISIS) militants and went on to highlight the plight of women kidnapped and enslaved by the group, was officially nominated by Iraq on Tuesday, January 5 for the Nobel Peace Prize.” ([Rudaw](#))

### **January 17: ISIS jihadis burn three Iraqi women to death on charges of spying for ‘crusader coalition’**

“Militants of the Islamic State (ISIS) radical group burned three women to death in the Iraqi northwestern city of Mosul on charges of spying for the U.S.-led coalition, local activists and eyewitnesses reported. The three women were arrested on Friday, January 15 and after interrogations ISIS accused them of having leaked security information to the western coalition and its allies in Iraq.” ([ARA News](#))

## **Israel**

### **January 6: Large Rise in Number of Women Serving on Israeli Government Panels**

“There has been a substantial increase in the number of women serving on public committees in recent years, according to a new government report. In the five years between 2009 and 2014, female representation on panels rose from 23 percent to 40 percent, or 37.9 percent if religious councils are included.” ([Haaretz](#))

### **January 8: Israel High Court Rules to Let Women Compete With Men for Rabbinical Court Role**

“The High Court of Justice has given the Justice Ministry 30 days to formulate new regulations that will allow women to compete equally with men for the position of director of rabbinical courts. The High Court accepted a petition filed by women's groups against the president of the rabbinical court and the Religious Services Ministry. The groups had requested a change in the requirements to become a director, which included the possession of a rabbinical diploma recognized by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. Women's inability to obtain such diplomas had prevented them from being considered for the post.” ([Haaretz](#))

### **January 18: Stabbing of Israeli Woman in West Bank Suggests Shift in Violence**

“In a charity store packed with used clothing on the edge of Tekoa, a Jewish settlement in the beige hills of the southern West Bank, Michal Froman, 30 and pregnant, was shopping when a Palestinian teenager walked in. Ms. Froman asked if she could help him, but he suddenly pulled out a knife, stabbing and wounding her. The attacks in Tekoa and Otniel suggest a shift in the recent surge of violence, during

which Palestinians have attacked Israeli soldiers, police officers and civilians, usually using knives, cars and guns as weapons.” ([New York Times](#))

## **Morocco**

### **January 14: Professionals are taking a stand to stop violence and discrimination against women in Morocco**

“In the region of Meknes, Morocco, 30 professionals including people from women’s rights groups, activists, and lawyers have taken part in human rights training in response to gender-based violence and discrimination against women. Over six days, participants received legal training and advice on how to assist women at risk of physical, sexual or psychological harm. This form of training of trainers has since multiplied in impact and led to an increase in educational projects targeted at other women across the region.” ([Amnesty International](#))

## **Oman**

### **January 11: Women excelling in research field in Oman, but face hurdles**

“Female graduates majoring in sciences, such as chemistry, biological technology, and environmental biology, among others, outweighed male graduates; in addition women also made it to the Dean’s list, which is an honorary mention for students’ achievements, more often than the male students. Unfortunately, women face several challenges, such as an inherent gender bias, discouragement at a young age, confidence gap and lack of role models.” ([Times of Oman](#))

## **Palestinian Territories**

### **January 5: Women journalists raise their voices in Gaza**

“In male-dominated Palestinian society, female journalists in the Gaza Strip have been striving to get ahead. By improving the image of women in the various media outlets and increasing local coverage of women's issues, they hope to make society recognize that women are essential partners to men, strengthen the role of women's organizations and develop the role of female Palestinian journalists.” ([Al Monitor](#))

### **January 8: Why Palestinian housewives are taking lead in boycott campaigns**

“Palestinian women have recently been joining the global BDS (boycott, divestment, and sanctions) movement by launching their own local campaigns to encourage people to refrain from buying Israeli goods.” ([Al Monitor](#))

## **Saudi Arabia**

### **January 7: Women councilors insist on sitting at same table as men**

“The two women elected as municipal councilors in Jeddah have shown they were in a stronger position to change and shape the local landscape after they insisted on sitting at the same table where their male counterparts were seated. The first meeting of the newly elected councilors in the Red Sea city was scheduled to start, but when Luma Sulaiman and Rasha Hefdhi were told they would sit at a different table and that they would be separated from the men by a frosted glass, they refused.” ([Gulf News](#))

### **January 11: Sisters in Law (Essay by Katherine Zoepf)**

“In 2004, Saudi Arabia introduced reforms allowing women’s colleges and universities to offer degree programs in law. So far, the greatest effect of the reforms seems to be a growing awareness, among

ordinary Saudi women, of the legal rights they do have, and an increasing willingness to claim these rights, even by seeking legal redress, if necessary.” ([The New Yorker](#))

### **January 13: Sister of Saudi blogger Raif Badawi briefly detained in same prison**

“Samar Badawi, a prominent Saudi human rights advocate—and the sister of jailed blogger Raif Badawi—has been freed on bail after being arrested and held briefly in the same prison as her brother. According to Ensaf Haidar (Raif Badawi’s wife), Amnesty International, and the Raif Badawi Foundation—a Canadian advocacy group—Samar is believed to have been arrested for posting to a Twitter account used to campaign for the release of her former husband, Waleed Abu al-Khair, and for publishing of photo of him in jail.” ([The Guardian](#))

### **January 17: E-commerce creates more opportunities for Saudi women**

“Many economists stress the importance of electronic markets in Saudi Arabia, their financial mega-returns and the availability of jobs for young businesswomen. They have also revealed that Saudi women are strongly present in these markets, and have achieved success, stressing the need to support the work of Saudi women in this electronic sector. Chairperson of Fashion Design in the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Oumayma Azzouz, revealed that the use of electronic technology is a clear indication of the economic success, considering that women’s work in this context is one of the most important opportunities that enhance women’s income sources.” ([Arab News](#))

## **Syria**

### **January 7: Two Sisters’ Escape from Syria (Essay by Sarah A. Topol)**

“In this year’s massive human migration to Europe, some young women have been forced to make the journey alone. Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, in 2011, more than 4 million refugees have crossed the border to escape the conflict. Two-thirds are men, and most of the women and children who make the journey are traveling with their families.” ([New York Magazine](#))

### **January 13: Syrian Kurdish Female Fighters Expand Ranks Against IS**

“Syrian Kurdish female fighters are expanding their ranks on the frontlines of the fight against Islamic State militants in northeastern Syria. In a remote camp near the Kurdish city of Afrin in northwestern Syria, the leadership of Women’s Protection Units (YPJ) continues to recruit and train young women to prepare them for combat missions against IS.” ([Voice of America](#))

## **Tunisia**

### **January 15: Is Tunisia the beacon of women’s rights it claims to be? (Op-ed by Shiromi Pinto)**

“14 January marks five years since Tunisians successfully ousted President Ben Ali. Alongside calls for freedom, dignity and better living conditions, Tunisia’s uprising came with hopes for stronger rights for Tunisia’s 5.5 million women. Tunisia has a reputation for being a leader on women’s rights in the Arab world. But does that reputation stand up to scrutiny?” ([Amnesty International](#))

## **Turkey**

### **January 7: Women stage sit-in for peace at Turkish parliament**

“Women human rights activists have staged a sit-in at Turkey’s parliament to protest ongoing military operations in the southeast and to call on parliament to ensure peace in the region. During the protest by professor Şebnem Korur Fincancı, Mine Nazari, Nadire Mater, Neşe Özgen, Nimet Tanrikulu and Ümit

Efe, and Ümit Sezer, the group expressed their wish for a free, democratic, equal, just and peaceful country. ‘End the war, talk peace,’ the group of women chanted during the protest.” ([Hurriyet](#))

### **United Arab Emirates**

#### **January 16: How Women in the UAE Lead Successful Businesses (Op-ed by Mohammad Riaz Usman)**

“Women in the UAE are leading entrepreneurship as more females are coming forward to turn their ideas into successful businesses. According to the UAE Ministry of Economy, women in the country contribute to nearly half of the small-and-medium enterprise sector and, interestingly, 48 per cent of female business owners are the sole owners of their firms. The UAE is ranked as a leader in gender equality in the region, according to the World Economic Forum's 2014 Global Gender Gap report.” ([Khaleej Times](#))


### **General**

#### **January 9: OIC appoints four women to top posts**

“The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has appointed four Arab women to top positions in the 47-year-old organization. Iyad Madani, the OIC’s secretary general, is committed to women’s empowerment, according to a report in a local publication. The new appointees, from Saudi Arabia, Mauritania, Algeria and Yemen, will work at the OIC’s headquarters in Jeddah in the departments of cultural and social affairs, media and information, women and family, and political affairs.” ([Arab News](#))

**By Nishaat Shaik**

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