

# **MENA Women's News Brief**

## **March 10, 2015-March 24, 2015**

### **March 11 (Op-Ed) Arab Women in the workforce: An ongoing struggle (Yara al-Wazir)**

“Female participation in the workforce has increased at a rate of 0.17 percent per year over the past three decades, according to the World Bank. With only 25 percent of Arab women actively participating in the labor market, the fight for equal employment rights and improved female participation in the labor market is an on-going struggle.” ([Al Arabiya](#))

### **March 12: (Op-Ed) Can you be an Islamist and a feminist? (Madawi Al-Rasheed)**

“Although Islamism and feminism have gender at the heart of their activism and projects, being an Islamist and being a feminist are different matters. Many believe a combination of the two is implausible, but it is, however, possible if one is prepared to accept that there are multiple feminisms and Islamisms in the world today.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

### **March 23: 26 arrests after mob beats, burns Afghan woman**

“A mob of male attackers beat and kicked 27-year-old Farkhunda before tossing her off a bridge, setting her body on fire and throwing it in the river. Like many Afghans, Farkhunda used only one name. Twenty-six people have been arrested in connection with the killing, Afghanistan's Interior Minister Noorul Haq Ulumi said Monday in a statement before parliament.” ([CNN](#))

### **Algeria**

#### **March 16: Algerian women take to streets to bring back traditional veil**

“Women across Algeria are organising events to defend an iconic garment worn by their ancestors but now almost completely forgotten. Some of them prefer this traditional veil, the haik, to the hijab that they view as imported from the Middle East. From Ottoman times onwards, it was worn by city-dwelling women who ventured outside the home.” ([France 24](#))

### **Bahrain**

#### **March 18: Women's rights activists call for UN to protect them in their work**

“Maryam al-Khawaja was arrested, assaulted and imprisoned for three weeks when she attempted to visit her political activist father in prison in Bahrain last year. At an event on Monday, March 16, organised by the civil society network Civicus and hosted at this year's Commission on the Status of Women, in New York, al-Khawaja and two other women activists called on the UN secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, to show leadership on defending the rights of female activists, and on member states to act on the resolution passed in 2013 to ensure they are protected in their work.” ([The Guardian](#))

### **Egypt**

#### **March 12: Cairo's women-only metro carriages reveal Egypt tensions**

“On Cairo's Metro, women have the choice of sharing carriages with men or travelling in carriages reserved only for them. It is a unique place that offers a window into life in Egypt's capital.” ([BBC News](#))

### **March 17: Egypt honors mother who dressed as man for 43 years to provide for family**

“An Egyptian woman who disguised herself as a man for 43 years in order to make a living for her daughter after the death of her husband was honored Tuesday, March 17 by the government as the ‘ideal mother’ of Luxor governorate.” ([Al Arabiya](#))

### **March 17: Egypt to try police officer for killing female protester**

“Egypt’s chief prosecutor on Tuesday, March 17 referred a police officer to trial for the killing of Shaimaa el-Sabbagh, a protester, during a peaceful demonstration nearly two months earlier in a widely documented shooting.” ([Washington Post](#))

### **March 18: The rising number of female Egyptian entrepreneurs**

“A 2014 report by the Global Entrepreneurship Development Institute, which studied how straightforward it was for women to grow businesses in 30 countries around the world, put Egypt in 28th place... however, Alia El Mahdi, a professor of economics at Cairo University, says that today’s rate of 11 percent of Egyptian entrepreneurs being women compares with just 3 percent eight years ago.” ([BBC News](#))

### **March 21: Egyptian Official Says Protester, Shaimaa el-Sabbagh, Died in Shooting Because She Was Too Thin**

“A poet and activist hit with a blast of birdshot from a police shotgun during a march to lay flowers in Tahrir Square in Cairo died because she was too thin, a spokesman for Egypt’s medical examiner said late Saturday, March 21. The poet and activist, Shaimaa el-Sabbagh, was killed on January 24.” ([New York Times](#))

## **Iran**

### **March 11: Iran: Proposed laws reduce women to ‘baby making machines’ in misguided attempts to boost population**

“Women in Iran could face significant restrictions on their use of contraceptives and be further excluded from the labour market unless they have had a child if two proposed laws are approved, says a new report by Amnesty International published on March 11.” ([Amnesty International](#))

### **March 11: How Iranian women are using Sharia to their benefit**

“The main justification for discriminatory laws against women is that they are based on shari’a, and therefore cannot and should not be challenged. For decades, Iranian women have struggled to prove that shari’a does not discriminate against women per se.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

### **March 15: Iran's female MPs show mixed record**

“Nine out of 290 members of the Iranian parliament are women. This 3 percent membership puts Iran near the bottom of the international measures of female parliamentary representation. Women have never been more than 5 percent of the parliament, but they have always been among the key political players on both sides of the political divide in the Islamic Republic.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

### **March 16: Rocking the casbah: the gig of a lifetime that put Iranian women back on stage**

“Three years ago, the Iranian singer and composer Sara Najafi came up with the idea of hosting a concert in Tehran, her hometown. The concert would be ‘a festival of the female voice’ featuring solo singers – not just Iranians, but artists from France and Tunisia, too. Nothing like it had been attempted in

Iran for 35 years: after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, women were banned from singing solo in public.” ([The Guardian](#))

### **March 16: Iran’s Oppression of Rights, Women Worse Under Rouhani, UN Says**

“Violations of human rights and oppression of minorities and women in Iran have worsened under President Hassan Rouhani, who took office as a moderate promising to improve the lives of Iranians, Ahmed Shaheed, the UN’s special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, said.” ([Bloomberg](#))

## **Israel**

### **March 11: Israeli ultra-Orthodox women target the job market**

“Ultra-Orthodox women have told the publication ‘The Marker’ what is required of them on the job. The key: the right social connections and being born to the right parents. They say important qualities for women in the ultra-Orthodox, or Haredi, community are being Ashkenazi, born in Jerusalem and a graduate with good grades from the new seminary run by Rabbi Yeshayahu Lieberman. Most important is being the daughter of a highly regarded family.” ([Haaretz](#))

### **March 16: Two women shape Israel's politics**

“Young Knesset members Ayelet Shaked from HaBayit HaYehudi and Stav Shaffir from the Zionist Camp are the quintessential symbols of the generational changes in Israeli politics. The two women hail from opposite sides of the traditional political spectrum that extends from right to left: Shaked is a prominent figure in HaBayit HaYehudi (a religious party) and Shaffir, with Labor, is an icon of the rejuvenated social-democratic left. Nevertheless, the two have a lot in common when it comes to shaping the future political establishment.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

### **March 20: Final Knesset tally bumps female Members of Knesset (MKs) up to 29**

“The new Knesset will have more female MKs than any that came before it, as 29 women will vote in the new parliament, two more than in the 19th Knesset. There will also be 38 first-time MKs sworn in, from a wide variety of parties.” ([Jerusalem Post](#))

## **Lebanon**

### **March 23: Women demand right to pass on citizenship to their children**

“Over a hundred activists and their children gathered in Downtown Beirut Sunday, March 22 to protest Lebanon’s nationality law that prevents them from passing citizenship to their family members. According to Lebanese law, women married to non-Lebanese cannot pass their citizenship onto their husbands or their children, which deprives them of entitlements to health and employment reserved for citizens.” ([Lebanon Daily Star](#))

## **Libya**

### **March 11: Libyan woman gives opening address at UN 59th session of Commission on the Status of Women**

“The Voice of Libyan Women founder Alaa Murabit addressed the audience at the UN Commission on the Status of Women this week. Murabit, one of three youth representatives for the UN Women’s Global Civil Society Advisory Group, was given the honour of giving the opening address for the event, an event that took place in the same week as the 2015 celebration of International Women’s Day (IWD).” ([Libya Herald](#))

## Palestinian Territories

### **March 19: Palestine's first female governor recounts her struggle**

“When it came to explaining the secret behind her success, Laila Ghannam gave credit to her family — in particular, her father. A supportive family is necessary for the success of women, she told Al-Monitor. ‘In our family, my father supported our decisions, and he always used to tell us, ‘Anyone who does not make mistakes will not learn.’’” ([Al-Monitor](#))

## Saudi Arabia

### **March 18: Saudi woman sentenced to 70 lashes for allegedly insulting man on WhatsApp**

“A Saudi Arabian court has sentenced a woman to 70 lashes after she allegedly insulted a man on the messaging service WhatsApp. The 32-year-old, who has not been named, admitted to insulting the man but also refuted the verdict, according to reports in GulfNews.com and other local media.” ([The Independent](#))

## Syria

### **March 12: Chemical exposure in Syria tied to miscarriages, birth defects**

“Pregnant women exposed to chemical weapons during the August 2013 attack in Syria were much more likely to miscarry or deliver prematurely, new findings show. The study also found a high rate of serious birth defects among babies whose mothers had been exposed to poison gas.” ([Reuters](#))

### **March 19: (Op-Ed) The Women in the Middle of the War by Manal Omar**

“Stop by a women’s shelter in Syria today, and the inhabitants will tell you just how bleak the future looks. After more than four years of civil war, the pervasive sexual assault that has become a blight on the country, regardless of allegiance, shows no sign of abating. As violence increases, more women are growing convinced that the end of the war is more significant than who emerges as the winner.” ([Foreign Policy](#))

### **March 20: Photo Essay: Syria's women commandos**

“A member of a Female Commando Battalion which is part of the Syrian Army, wears her headgear in the government-controlled area of Jobar, a suburb of Damascus March 19, 2015. This Battalion consists of several hundred female fighters who have had military training and carry out combat duties. Picture taken during a Syrian Army organized trip.” ([Reuters](#))

## Yemen

### **March 18: What a Houthi-controlled Yemen means for women**

“Houthis published a circular in January 2015, pertaining to women in the city of Amran, banning them from going out following the Maghrib prayer, prohibiting them from bringing male bands or singers to their gatherings or parties, banning the use of cameras at women’s gatherings and parties, including mobile phones with cameras.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

By Julia Craig Romano



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