



MENA WOMEN NEWS BRIEF



MAY 11TH – MAY 24TH, 2018

EGYPT

May 17: How #MeToo and #TimesUp Are Helping Egyptian Women Break the Silence around Sexual Violence

“Movements like Me Too and Time’s up have put women’s rights firmly back on the agenda. But away from the spotlight, there are many other girls and women who are risking their lives to demand an end to sexual violence, harassment and inequality. Just recently, Egyptian activist Amal Fathy was arrested for posting a Facebook video in which she shared her experiences of sexual harassment. But women in Egypt refuse to be silenced. One of these unsung heroes is lawyer and founder of the Center for Egyptian Women’s Legal Assistance Azza Soliman. Azza risks her own safety and freedom to defend survivors of sexual violence in Egypt.” [\(TIME\)](#)

May 17: Women Ready to Run for Office in Egypt

“Egypt has yet to pass a law needed to hold local elections, but hundreds of women will not be wallflowers waiting for an invitation to run for office. Thanks to an initiative dubbed ‘The Councils Are Ours,’ potential candidates will be prepared when the elections are finally held for the first time in eight year [...] So far, the project has groomed 320 women in seven of Egypt’s 27 governorates. That might seem like a drop in the bucket – considering the Egyptian Constitution allots a quarter of local councils’ roughly 64,000 seats to women – but the impetus could increase exponentially.” [\(Al Monitor\)](#)

May 23: Women Fill Leading Roles in Egypt’s Ramadan TV Series

“The presence of strong female roles has been a subject of discussion for film critics, who have divergent views on what contributed to this increase. Some consider it a natural reflection of the focus on women in Egypt following President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s declaration that 2017 was “the year of women.” Others say that TV series, unlike cinema, have traditionally been more female-friendly anyway because of their focus on family entertainment, particularly during Ramadan. Still others claim that actresses in leading roles were so rare in the 1980s and 1990s that an improvement was inevitable. The question is whether this will be reflected in Egypt’s cinema, as it had been in the 1950s and 1960s, when the big screen was one of the pioneers of the Middle East with iconic female stars and strong female roles.” [\(Al Monitor\)](#)

May 24: Egypt Allows Women on Mosque Boards

“Egyptian women will be allowed to join boards of major mosques across the country for the first time, religious authorities have said, as the country is struggling against violent militancy. There will be two women on the board of each mosque with the aim of boosting attention to issues related to females, children and the family in religious work, said an official at the Ministry of Awqaf that is responsible for mosques in Egypt.” [\(Gulf News\)](#)



May 24: ‘I don’t Fear Death’ Pioneering Egyptian Feminist Defies Threats

“El Saadawi’s writing and political activism have made her many enemies over the intervening eight decades, upsetting governments, religious authorities and extremist groups alike. She has received countless death threats. Sacked from the health ministry in the 1970s, she was jailed in 1981 after criticizing President Anwar Sadat and spent nearly two decades in exile during President Hosni Mubarak’s rule. ‘When I was in jail, the jailer said, ‘If I find paper and pen in your cell, it’s more dangerous than if I find a gun,’ El Saadawi told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in an interview in London this week.” [\(Reuters\)](#)

IRAN

May 12: Shajarizadeh Twice Arrested For Allegedly Removing Her Headscarf in Public in Iran

“[Shaparak Shajarizadeh](#) has been arrested again for allegedly allowing her hair to show in public in Iran. Her lawyer, prominent human rights attorney Nasrin Sotoudeh, called the ongoing arrests of Iranian women for allegedly violating the country’s compulsory hijab rule a ‘manifestation of violence against women.’ ‘I don’t know if she removed her hijab or not but my question is, how come women get immediately arrested for not observing the hijab or having an inappropriate hijab, or wearing tight or short dresses, or wearing lipstick but in cases dealing with theft and murder, suspects never get arrested so fast?’ Sotoudeh said.” [\(Iran Human Rights Organization\)](#)

May 12: Turkish Women’s Festival Screening Iranian Movies

“A lineup of movies by Iranian filmmakers are being screened at the 21st Flying Broom International Women’s Film Festival underway in the Turkish capital Ankara. “Mother of the Earth” by Mahnaz Afzali and “Poets of Life” by Shirin Barqnavard, two films from “Karestan”, a documentary series on Iranian entrepreneurs, are seen in the screening program. “Karestan” depicts the successful lives of Iranian entrepreneurs and gives a new definition of careers in Iran. Each part has been directed by a different filmmaker under the supervision of the filmmakers Rakhshan Bani-Etemad and Mojtaba Mirtahmasb.” [\(Tehran Times\)](#)

May 17: Boris Johnson to Raise Zaghari-Ratcliffe Case with Iran Counterpart

“The foreign minister, Boris Johnson, is expected to raise the case of [Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#), a British-Iranian woman being held in an Iranian jail, when he meets his Iranian counterpart, Mohammad Javad Zarif, for talks in Brussels, Downing Street has said. The confirmation came after her husband, Richard Ratcliffe, urged Johnson to discuss the case with Zarif. The two foreign ministers were due to meet later on Tuesday in Brussels to discuss ways to shore up the Iran nuclear deal, from which the US has now withdrawn.” [\(The Guardian\)](#)

May 23: Rouhani Calls for End of Ban on Women in Sports Stadiums

“Iran’s president has called for an end to the ban on women entering sports stadiums. ‘If we want to introduce Islam to the world, is it better to say that our girls do not have the permission to take part in sport events, or is it better to say that our girls and women participate in various sport events and gain success while observing all religious principles?’ Rouhani told a gathering of athletes on Tuesday, according to a statement on his website. ‘There should be no difference between men and women in Islam and for that reason women should also be allowed to take part in sports events” and enter sports arenas, he said.’” [\(Rudaw\)](#)



May 24: 'What Problem' Asks Iran President, in Showing Women Play Sports on TV

Iran's moderate President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday questioned why the successes of women athletes representing the Islamic republic were not being shown on state television. "What problem is there in television showing women or girls in competition, especially when they courageously take on prestigious international teams and produce great victories?" he asked, quoted by the official IRNA news agency. He was referring specifically to Iran's 4-1 triumph over Japan in the final of an Asian tournament of futsal -- a five-a-side football game played on a hard pitch with hockey-sized goals -- on May 12 in Thailand. ([NDTV](#))

IRAQ

May 13: Forget Inglorious Basterds: Feminist War Movie Features Iraqi Women Fighting Back Against ISIS

"When they hear our female voices, they tremble with fear," says the heroine of "Girls of the Sun", a feminist war movie that captured the zeitgeist at a Cannes Film Festival dominated by the issue of women's rights. Based on the true story of Iraqi women who took up arms against Islamic State after escaping enslavement, a female battalion leads an attack on the jihadists while their brothers in arms prefer to wait for U.S. air strikes." ([Reuters](#))

May 16: First Female Communist Elected in Iraq's Holiest City Calls for 'Social Justice'

"Khateeb, who is a teacher, anti-poverty activist and women's rights activist, had not considered running in previous parliamentary elections. "I didn't run in the [2014] election, but I was part of a group that visited people all over the Najaf," she told Middle East Eye. "We visited them to listen to their problems and help them, in the slums of Najaf and the poor neighborhoods. I had not thought about running in elections." However, she was motivated to run on the Sairoun Alliance ticket this time around after garnering support from her colleagues and students." ([Middle East Eye](#))

May 23: Women in Iraqi Politics: Breaking the Glass Ceiling

"Kurdish women who fought for a seat in the Iraqi parliament are adamant they will break the political glass ceiling in spite of smear campaigns and the limits of the 25 percent quota allotted to female MPs in the 329-seat chamber. Rudaw English interviewed five women who ran in the May 12 election to ask why they were keen to enter the political fray in a male-dominated society and why they persisted despite the challenges. The women interviewed came from a variety of backgrounds - some political, others not - but all shared a common aim: to improve not only the national interests of the Kurdish people, but to campaign for women's rights and equality in Iraq." ([Rudaw](#))

JORDAN

May 23: Women Leadership Councils Empower Syrian Females to 'Make Their Voices Heard'

"Over 400 Syrian women have been trained on human rights and gender through the four Women Leadership Councils (WLCs) established by CARE International over the past year in the governorates of Amman, Zarqa, Irbid and Mafraq, aiming to support Syrian women and girls in Jordan in achieving "effective engagement" with their local communities. 'Based on CARE's belief in the need to establish partnerships in all aspects of life, our objective was to integrate Syrian women into the Jordanian society," the NGO explained in a statement issued last Monday.'" ([Jordan Times](#))

LEBANON

May 16: Lebanese Actress Denounces Gaza Killings at Cannes

"French-Lebanese actress Manal Issa drew attention to Israel's slaughter this week of dozens of Gaza civilians, holding up a sign on the Cannes international film festival's red carpet that read 'Stop the attack on Gaza.' Issa was attending the premier of the film "Solo: A Star Wars Story" when she hoisted her protest sign Tuesday. Cannes has a worldwide following as one of the largest and most influential international festivals for premiering new films." ([The Daily Star](#))



May 20: Nadine Labaki Makes Cannes History as First Female Arab Filmmaker to Win Major Prize

“Lebanese filmmaker Nadine Labaki made history at Cannes last night as the first female Arab filmmaker to win a major prize in competition. She picked up the Jury Prize for her moving child refugee drama *Capernaum*, which received a 15-minute standing ovation at its premiere screening earlier in the week.” [\(The National\)](#)

OMAN**May 13: Omantel Hosts First Omani Woman to Ski North Pole**

“A 34 years old enthusiast has made history by becoming the first Omani woman to ski the Geographic North Pole. With a major support from Omantel, Anisa Al Raisi joined the ‘Women’s Euro-Arabian North Pole Expedition 2018’ and set off for a challenging expedition last month, where they managed to ski just over 80km on the treacherous terrain at the top of the world and reached the North Pole in 8 days.” [\(Times of Oman\)](#)

SAUDI ARABIA**May 15: Riyadh Hosts First Women’s Car Exhibition**

“Dubbed ‘Pinkish’, the three-day exhibition allowed women to see the high-end cars on display, interact with dealers and insurance company representatives, and learn about special offers. Organizers reported women enthusiastically discussed with their relatives and companions what cars would suit them best as they spent time on simulators to get a feel for the experience they expect to have starting June 24, when they will be allowed to drive. Riyadh hosts first women’s car exhibition.” [\(Gulf News\)](#)

May 17: Saudi Women Troll Men Telling Them 'You Won't Drive'

“It is a matter of weeks until the ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia will be lifted. Some men have taken to social media to vent their dissatisfaction with the change in the law, using an Arabic hashtag that translates as: ‘You won't drive.’ However, the hashtag went viral when Saudi women began hitting back at the sexist remarks. ‘You won’t drive’ has been used on Twitter over 65,000 times since Monday. Lots of women posted funny pictures and videos to accompany their response to the hashtag.” [\(BBC\)](#)

May 17: Dina Shihabi: The Actress Blazing a Trail for Saudi Women

“After officially reintroducing movie theaters last month, and establishing an opera house and national orchestra, along with the now frequent staging of musical and sporting events, Saudi Arabia is in the midst of an entertainment overhaul. But long before any of these reforms began taking place in the Kingdom, a young Saudi actress by the name of Dina Shihabi was already blazing a trail for Saudi women in cinema as she began her own film journey in the face of regional and cultural obstacles. She was motivated to pursue an acting career and persist despite the challenges she faced along the way, and is now delighted to be witnessing the incredible, rapid changes for women, and the film industry, in Saudi Arabia.” [\(Arab News\)](#)

May 23 Saudi Arabia Widens Crackdown on Women’s Rights Activist

“Saudi Arabia has reportedly arrested three more women's rights activists in a crackdown launched just weeks before a ban on women driving will be lifted. Human rights groups said at least 11 people, most of them women who had long campaigned for the right to drive, had now been detained since last week. Officials have said they are suspected of "suspicious contact with foreign parties" and undermining "stability". Other activists have said the crackdown is "unprecedented" and "shocking". The US has expressed concern about the detentions and said it is "keeping a close eye" on the progress of reforms in the Gulf state, which is a key regional ally.” [\(BBC\)](#)

TUNISIA

May 12: 'I Can Finally Dream': Tunisia Expands Protection for Battered Women

"In 2016, 60 percent of Tunisian women were victims of domestic violence, according to the Ministry of Women, Family and Children, with studies from nongovernmental groups suggesting the figure may even be higher. And 50 percent of women said they had experienced aggression in a public area at least once in their lives. Legislators and women's activists say they are hoping to reduce those numbers with the new law and the shelters that opened at the recommendation of the legislation."

[\(The New York Times\)](#)

May 23: Tunisian Women Win at Polls but Long Road Remains

"Abdel Rahim told Al-Monitor, 'We hope a woman can fill the position of president or prime minister for the first time in the elections that will be held in 2019,' while saying that the patriarchal view that still prevails is preventing her from becoming the first woman to head the Tunis municipality. She also condemned violence against women and attacks on female candidates for either wearing the veil or not wearing one. In a May 8 interview with privately owned M Tunisia TV, Nidaa Tunis leader Fuad Bouslama ruled out the possibility of reaching a consensus with Ennahda for Rahim to head the the Tunis municipality, saying, "If a woman were to serve as sheikh of the city of Tunis, it would be contrary to religious traditions. We are an Islamic country." However, these views were rejected by Nidaa Tunis' central committee in a May 9 statement, which said Bouslama's words "were his own and do not represent the party." [\(Al Monitor\)](#)

TURKEY

May 16: Turkey Launches Mobile App to Respond Faster to Cases of Violence against Women

"Turkey has launched a mobile application called "Women Support" (KADES) for victims of violence with the joint cooperation of the Family and Social Policies Ministry and Interior Ministry.' "This application seeks to ensure women reach our police forces and receive help when under any threat, with just one touch,' Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu said on May 16 during a meeting to promote the application." [\(Hurriyet Daily News\)](#)

OPINION/ANALYSIS

May 15: Palestinian Women's Struggle Hasn't Translated to Political Power

"Palestinian women have been in the forefront of Palestinian national activism and sacrifice since the spark of the Palestinian revolution. Despite this well-documented fact, Palestinian men in political power, like men in society itself, will not easily give up power. The change will only occur as a result of consistent and united efforts by both Palestinian women and men." [\(Al Monitor\)](#)

May 17: Arab Cinema Back with a Bang; Bringing Lepers, Lust and Class Conflict to Cannes

"A boy who takes his parents to court for having him is one of a wave of Arab films making people sit up and take notice at the Cannes film festival. Not since 1970 have two Arab films been in the running for the Palme d'Or top prize and female Arab directors are particularly making a splash this year. Lebanese filmmaker Nadine Labaki's highly-anticipated third film "Capernaum" – about a 12-year-old boy with an axe to grind about being born into a miserable, loveless existence – has racked up a string of distribution deals ahead of its premiere late Thursday." [\(Arab News\)](#)

May 23: Why I Can't Go Back to Saudi Arabia to Drive for the First Time with My Son

"The recent arrest of women's rights activists has marred what was meant to be a history-making event in Saudi Arabia next month — the lifting of the ban on women driving. Last October, I penned a piece just after the historic decree to end the ban, stating, "For the first time, I dare to dream of a different Saudi Arabia in the coming years." Right now, I am watching with so much heartache as my hopes and dreams vanish into thin air. I was putting the final touches on the Miles4Freedom website, a campaign to coincide with Saudi women taking the wheel, when the news came through: At least seven Saudi activists were being detained in their homes without a warrant or an explanation. " [\(The Washington Post\)](#)

May 24: Hezbollah Embarrassed in Row over Labaki's Cannes Success

"During the Labaki-Hezbollah debate, we saw some people attempt to disparage the arts and cinema and consider weapons of the greatest value, while others believed Lebanon was meaningless if not for the few cultural activities and achievements that still exist. The story ended with Hezbollah withdrawing from the debate after heavy losses, releasing a statement that said: 'What some people have said does not express Hezbollah's opinion and was unnecessary.' In fact, this statement shows that, while Hezbollah is capable of influencing political and security decisions by force of arms, it is unable to enter other very important fields — those related to the arts, culture, and freedom of creativity. The party walked out of these a loser." [\(Arab News\)](#)

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~ ~ ~ By May Baaklini ~ ~ ~

