



MENA WOMEN NEWS BRIEF



JUNE 24TH – JULY 12TH, 2018

EGYPT

June 24: Egyptian Women Look to Boost Presence in Police Force

“From June 15-17, Egypt’s Ministry of Interior deployed the largest number of female police cadres it had ever dispatched on Egyptian streets as well as around cinemas and parks in a bid to provide security for the Eid al-Fitr holiday celebrations. The task of these female police members was to ward off harassment of and violence against women, which are common during holidays and public events. The beefed up and organized presence of trained female police officers drew the attention of several local and regional Arabic- and English-language newspapers – some even went so far as to praise the role of women at the Ministry of Interior.” ([Al Monitor](#))

June 28: More Women to Join the Peacekeeping Force

“Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said that his country is proud of its contribution to peacekeeping forces stationed in African countries with 3,000 Egyptian men and women spread across the Congo, Mali, the Central African Republic and Darfur. During a speech to mark the foreign ministry’s celebration of Peace Day, Shoukry said Egypt is proud to be training its peacekeeping forces in preparation for the increasing of its size and also in preparation for a rise in the number of women joining its ranks. Shoukry said that the peacekeeping community is working towards confronting complex and serious matters to create peace, primarily through political solutions in areas of conflict.” ([Middle East Monitor](#))

July 11: 2 Million Egyptian Women Have no Access to Contraceptives: Officials

“As the world is marking the 29th anniversary of the Population Day, an Egyptian public health professor at Cairo University stressed that 2 million Egyptian women, mostly in Upper Egypt, have no access to contraceptives. Maisa Shawki, former deputy health minister, said family planning services should be made widely available through providing contraceptives and raising awareness of both men and women about the importance of reproductive health. Overpopulation and limited resources are among the biggest challenges facing development in Egypt, she added.” ([Egypt Today](#))

July 12: Two Egyptian Female Weightlifter Clinch Golden Medals at IWF

“Egyptian athlete Sara Samir has won the gold medal in the Snatch under 69 KG category of the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) Junior Championships, held in Uzbekistan on July 7 until July 14. Samir is set to compete for the Clean and Jerk category, as well to determine the world champion for this year. She previously won the bronze medal at the Rio 2016 Olympics, lifting 105kg in the Snatch and 133kg in the Clean and Jerk for a total of 238kg. Meanwhile, Egyptian athlete Esraa al-Sayed also clinched a gold medal in the Snatch and two silver medals in the Clean and Jerk under 63 kg in the IWF.” ([Egypt Independent](#))



IRAN

July 6: Iranian Women’s Movement Pushes for More Rights, at its own Pace

“Rights activists have put in a great deal of effort to overcome the traditional, cultural and legal challenges that women confront in Iranian society. In many cases, these efforts have been fruitful and resulted in the removal of certain obstacles. The ban on entering sports events at stadiums, and especially for soccer games, is one of the strangest restrictions imposed on Iranian women in recent years. While women are allowed in cinemas or concert halls, they have been prevented from entering soccer stadiums. But this restriction was briefly lifted for this year’s World Cup. Now, there are hopes that this will pave the way for subsequent orders that allow women to watch live games at stadiums, too.” [\(Al Monitor\)](#)

July 9: Iran’s Shaming of Young Dancer Draws Backlash

“The 19-year-old was quietly arrested in May and her page was taken down, leaving her 600,000 followers wondering where she had gone. The answer came last Tuesday on state television, when some of her fans recognized a blurred image of Ms. Hojabri on a show called ‘Wrong Path.’ There she sobbingly admitted that dancing is a crime and that her family had been unaware she had videos of herself dancing in her bedroom to Western songs like ‘Bonbon,’ by Era Istrefi. Whatever the authorities’ intent, the public shaming of Ms. Hojabri and the arrest of others who have not been identified have created a backlash in a society already seething over a bad economy, corruption and a lack of personal freedoms.” [\(The New York Times\)](#)

July 9: Iran Women Dance in Support of Arrested Instagram Teen

“Women in Iran have posted videos of themselves dancing online, in support of a teenager who was arrested. Maedeh Hojabri had gathered thousands of followers on Instagram with videos of herself dancing to Iranian and Western pop music. Social media users shared videos and messages supporting the young dancer, using hashtags such as one that translates as #dancing_isn't_a_crime.” [\(BBC News\)](#)

July 10: Woman Sentenced to Two Years in Prison for Removing Her Headscarf in Iran

“An Iranian woman who removed her headscarf in public to protest her country’s oppressive laws has been sentenced to two years in prison, as well as an additional 18-year suspended sentence. ‘This means that I will have to be silent for 20 years and not get involved in any activities,’ the woman, Shaparak Shajarizadeh, said Monday in a widely shared social media post. She explained that she has left Iran to avoid serving prison time and escape ‘injustices,’ Radio Free Europe reported.” [\(Newsweek\)](#)

IRAQ

July 5: ‘Disappointed’ Wives are Divorcing ISIS Thugs

“Jihadists are finding that joining ISIS is detrimental to their married lives. A growing number of the militants’ wives are filing for divorce as the terror group is driven out of territory it once controlled across large swaths of Iraq and Syria, according to NBC News. Iraqi Deputy Justice Minister Hussein Jassem said there has been “a huge increase’ in divorce requests in the last three months – with the vast majority filed by women. While the government has not tracked the number of ISIS-related divorces, there has been a significant increase in requests in Sunni Muslim regions, including Anbar and Nineveh where the group was strong, he said.” [\(The New York Post\)](#)

ISRAEL/PALESTINE

June 28: Many Gazan Women are No Longer Able to Enter Israel for Cancer Treatment

“Why the sudden change? ‘We have only theories,’ Mor Efrat, who oversees Gaza and the West Bank for P.H.R.I., told me last week. It’s not because treating Palestinian patients places an undue financial burden on Israel. More than ninety per cent of Gazans’ medical bills are covered by the Palestinian Health Ministry, or by the patients themselves. And it’s not because of last month’s violent protests at the border fence: the decline in permit approvals preceded them. Instead, the reason appears to be growing pressure from the family of an Israeli soldier who was killed in Gaza in 2014. Hamas has refused to return his body and that of another slain soldier.” [\(The New Yorker\)](#)

June 29: Sufi Women Blazing a New Trail in Nablus

“Debai leads a group of 40 women who gather every Monday at the Sheikh Muslim Zawiya, a Sufi religious school, in the heart of the old town in Nablus, to attend the [hadra](#), a collective ritual performed by Sufi orders...The Nablus zawiya was rehabilitated by the Palestinian Ministry of Religious Endowments 15 years ago. ‘We used to gather here for religion classes, but we felt that hadra is spiritually richer, so we switched from plain lessons to hadra’, Debai told Al-Monitor. What began with some 10 women two years ago now attracts 40 regulars, some of whom travel from the Jordan Valley and surrounding villages to attend.” [\(Al Monitor\)](#)

July 13: World Bank Reports High Rate of Palestinian Women leading Startups

“Palestinian women are participating at relatively high rates in leading roles at technology startups in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a World Bank report published on Wednesday found. Twenty-three percent of Palestinians who founded tech companies in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are women, according to the report. In comparison, 19 percent, 12%, and 10% of startup founders are women in Beirut, New York City, and Cairo, respectively, the report said.” [\(Times of Israel\)](#)

JORDAN

July 9: The Jordan Compact Could Work Better if We Listen to Women Refugees

“Syrian refugees in Jordan have talked about their fears and challenges, views and culture, since their arrival. But have we been listening? Laura Buffoni of the U.N. refugee agency reflects on why the [Jordan Compact](#) is failing women and urges better-designed policies.” Buffoni goes on to say: ‘As I reflect on my recent years in Jordan, I still have many questions of my own. Does the Jordan Compact enable people – and especially women – the right to decide how much and how quickly to change? How can we analyze social dynamics and social norms and together design change? I feel strongly for example about promoting child care as a shared responsibility within the family. But is this a discussion that we are all are ready for? How do we work with men to facilitate their wives’, sisters’ and daughters’ participation in the work force in an unfamiliar setting?’ [\(Newsdeeply\)](#)

LEBANON

June 25: Women Seek Abortions Quietly, Fear Prosecution

“Due to its illegality, there is no official data on the incidence of abortions, with estimates ranging widely. Articles 539-546 of the Lebanese penal code prohibit abortions under all circumstances unless to save the pregnant woman’s life. The law also bans the ‘dissemination of propaganda for the purpose of propagating or facilitating methods of abortion and the selling, offer of sale, or possession with the intent to sell of objects designed to perform an abortion. Pregnant women who consent to or induce an abortion are subject to a penalty of six months to three years’ imprisonment. Penalties for the person performing the abortion vary, depending on whether the woman is physically harmed by the medical intervention and whether she agreed to it.” [\(The Daily Star\)](#)

July 7: Egypt Sentences Lebanese Tourist to 8 Years in Prison for Facebook Video

“An Egyptian court sentenced a Lebanese tourist to eight years in prison on Saturday after she posted a video tirade on her Facebook page that Egyptian authorities claimed had insulted the country and its leader. The news website Ahram reported that Mona el-Mazbough was initially handed an 11-year sentence and a fine after she was convicted of ‘deliberately broadcasting false rumors which aim to undermine society and attack religions.’ But her sentence was immediately reduced to eight years. Under Egyptian law, ‘defaming and insulting the Egyptian people’ is a crime.” [\(The New York Times\)](#)

July 11: Christian Atik Questions what is ‘Not Nice’ for a Girl

“A new artist is in town with illustrations depicting Lebanese women and issues that the latter are faced with. Christina Atik took over Instagram with her latest series about women where she illustrates how they are treated and talked to in Lebanon. “It was a form of therapy for me, to let out all this frustration from the society around me,” said Atik...The young generation, made up of people like Atik, is speaking up more about the problems women face in the Arab world. With the free platforms offered, such as social media, people have a chance to share their opinions and thoughts on relevant topics. Using Instagram, Atik was able to shed light on taboos people avoid talking about, and gave hope for women around Lebanon to feel empowered and heard.” [\(Annahar\)](#)

LIBYA

June 25: Women Human Rights Defenders under Attack, Four Years after Activist’s Assassination

“The Libyan authorities must do more to protect women human rights defenders in the country and investigate the repeated violent attacks against them, Amnesty International said today, four years after the killing of renowned Libyan human rights lawyer and activist Salwa Bugaighis. She was shot dead in her home in the eastern city of Benghazi on 25 June 2014 - her assassination triggering a downward spiral in security for women human rights defenders that has persisted ever since.” [\(Amnesty International\)](#)

July 11: Woman Accused of Spying for Bettering Role of Libyan Woman

“Fatima Nasser’s new business had barely got off the ground when she was accused of being a foreign spy for giving women employment opportunities in Libya, her war-torn home country. The accusation was a measure of the opposition working women face in the conservative Muslim country, which has been in turmoil since a NATO-backed revolt toppled long-time leader Muammar Qaddafi in 2011. Just one in four Libyan women is employed, according to World Bank data – a situation Nasser, 21, hopes to change with a new food delivery app that allows them to earn money from their own kitchens. ‘I’m just doing something to help women that I know deserve better. They need opportunities, just like males,’ Yasser told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.” [\(Al Bawaba\)](#)

SAUDI ARABIA

June 14: Saudi Women Allowed to be Notaries for the First Time

“Women in Saudi Arabia will now be allowed to work as notaries, with 12 women granted permission licenses, the justice ministry said Monday. The move comes amid a reform drive in the ultra-conservative kingdom that saw the authorities lift a ban on women drivers in June. As notaries the women can now issue and cancel powers of attorney and certify documents to help establish companies or transfer property rights, the ministry said.” [\(Al Araby\)](#)

SYRIA

June 27: The Storytellers of Syria: Displaced Women keep Tradition and History Alive with Folktales

“Oral storytelling is a continued living tradition in Syria. In social gatherings of family and friends, women are at the centre of this popular art form, telling stories that are transmitted between generations. Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, more than 600,000 Syrians have fled to Jordan. The displacement of Syrian communities to Jordan has transformed the themes and content of these stories, as well as how they are told. Limited civil society efforts have been made to celebrate this tradition. Instead, the storytellers themselves, predominantly Syrian women, negotiate the future of oral histories.” [\(Al Araby\)](#)

June 29: Meet the Syrian Women Educating Refugee Girls about Early Marriage

“Aydah Alshraidab knows firsthand how early marriage can hold you back. A Syrian now living in Jordan, Alshraidab’s education was cut short when she got married. After her husband’s abuse became too much to bear, she got a divorce and became a single parent of two. She fled with her children when the fighting in Syria worsened in 2012. When she arrived in Jordan, ‘I felt broken and weak,’ she said recently through an interpreter. After finding her footing, she became an activist within her refugee community and is now part of a team of volunteers educating women and girls about their rights. ‘I advise every girl not to get married at an early age, get a decent degree and live your life, don’t let your feelings lead you and trust no one until you know him very well. Your degree will make you stronger and more mature to decide who to spend your life with,’ she said.” [\(PBS News Hour\)](#)

TUNISIA

July 10: Women’s Rights in Tunisia: Could First Female Mayor Signal Democratic Change?

“Last week, the Tunisian capital elected Souad Abderrahim its first female mayor in the first city elections since the Arab Spring. Could her victory signify a new direction for Tunisia’s formerly Islamist Ennahda party?[...] Sarah Yerkes, a research fellow and Middle East expert at the Carnegie Center of International Peace in Washington, DC told DW that the Ennahda party has been losing support across Tunisia in recent years and that Abderrahim’s candidacy was a way to attract new voters. ‘By putting forward this female mayor, my guess would be that the party leadership doesn’t think their base would be too riled up,’ Yerkes explained, noting that the Ennahda party in Tunis is more liberal than other parts of the country. That’s an important distinction to draw, she said, because a candidate like Abderrahim would not have had an easy path to victory elsewhere. ‘I don’t think that an unveiled Ennahda candidate would have won in the south,’ she said.” [\(Deutsche Welle\)](#)

UAE

June 28: UAE Women’s Rights Champion Finding a Formula for Gender Equality in the Sciences

“The new president of a government-backed group set up to empower women working and studying in science and technology is on a mission to ‘destroy gender barriers’ in the UAE - and make knowledge accessible to all. Hoda Al Khzaimi says she has had to overcome many hurdles in her career solely due to her gender, but she is determined to make the career path smoother for others in her role as the new president of Emirates Digital Association for Women.” [\(The National\)](#)

July 12: Bahrain Royal Becomes Kingdom’s First Female Fighter Pilot

“Bahraini Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman watched on Thursday as his granddaughter made her inaugural flight as the kingdom’s first female fighter pilot. Sheikha Aisha bint Rashid Al Khalifa took off from Sheikh Isa Air Base on hour-long flight demonstrating her skills piloting a BAE Hawk, state news agency BNA reported. [...] The young royal joins other GCC women who have taken to the skies in defence of their countries, including Major Mariam Al Mansouri, the UAE’s first female pilot”. [\(The National\)](#)

OPINION/ANALYSIS

July 8: I am a Palestinian Woman in Israel. You Don't Get to Define My Labels

"About a month ago I applied to attend a seminar for Israeli and Palestinian women to be held this summer in Germany. Two weeks later, I received an email from the organizers informing me that my application was rejected. The reason, they explained, was that I called myself a Palestinian Israeli. The Israeli designation, I was told, was reserved solely for Jewish women and the Palestinian designation was solely for Palestinian women from the West Bank or East Jerusalem. So where do I fit in? In the rejection letter, the organizers acknowledged the complexity of my identity as a Palestinian woman in Israel and were most apologetic about my having to pay the price for this complexity." ([Haaretz](#))

July 12: What the Arrest of an 18-year-old Instagram star Says about Iran's Backward Leaders

"Right now, the Iranian establishment is confronting a host of urgent issues: a collapsing currency; a continuing sanctions squeeze; a water shortage of epic proportions; and widespread protests over the state's inability to solve these problems. So it seems all the more surprising that the judiciary and security apparatus should spend so much of their valuable time on a teenage dancer." ([Washington Post](#))

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~~~ By **May Baaklini** ~~~

