

MENA Women News Brief

December 20, 2016-January 3, 2017

Egypt

December 23: Facing Trial, Award-Winning Egyptian Feminist Mozn Hassan Speaks Out

“As founder of feminist organization Nazra, Mozn Hassan has attracted the ire of the Egyptian authorities – which have banned her from leaving the country and are pursuing trumped-up charges against her. As she receives a major humanitarian award, *Broadly* speaks to her about her activism.”
([Broadly](#))

December 28: Egypt’s child custody laws: How to reform?

“An amendment to the personal status law – which regulates all issues related to the family, notably marriage, divorce and child custody in particular – proposed earlier in December sought to change this provision, but not in the way that women’s rights advocates have long called for.” ([Mada Masr](#))

December 28: Egypt's women find their voice against sexual harassment

“‘It was tough to get him to the police station,’ says Nemaam Gamal, 32, of the man who assaulted her. Weary after a day's work, she was shocked when a man openly groped her from behind as she rode home with a friend on a Cairo microbus in 2013. ‘I screamed at the top of my lungs and told the driver to stop at the nearest police station,’ she says. Luckily, the driver was helpful and a police station was near. But the attacker, a 52-year-old man, squeezed out of a bus window and took off running. Her friend jumped out of the bus with Gamal and caught the assailant and dragged him to the police station.” ([Deutsche Welle](#))

December 29: NCW prepares 12 thousand women candidates for local councils

“Maya Morsy, President of the National Council for Women (NCW), said that the council had finished the first phase of training women who would participate in upcoming elections for the local city councils across the country. Under the slogan ‘Prove your strength, you are entitled to a quarter your local council,’ the NCW has been organizing awareness campaigns in different governorates on women's political rights, encouraging them to participate in the upcoming elections.” ([Egypt Independent](#))

January 2: Egypt parliamentary committee approves tougher penalties for sexual harassment

“An Egyptian legislative parliamentary committee approved on Monday, January 2 a draft bill pushing for tougher penalties on sexual harassment. According to Al-Ahram Arabic news website, the draft bill was presented by committee member Suzy Nashed who called for amendments to the existing anti-sexual harassment law.” ([Ahram Online](#))

Iran

December 27: At least 16 Kurdish women are political prisoners in Iran

“At least sixteen Kurdish women are political prisoners in Iran, the Kurdistan Press Agency (Kurdpa) reported, stating that some are serving 10-year prison sentences and others are serving indefinite terms. The Iranian authorities have imprisoned these women mainly on charges of assisting Kurdish political parties in eastern Kurdistan, Iran.” ([Rudaw](#))

January 1: Iran Official Calls For Sterilization For Sex Workers, Homeless Drug Addicts

“An Iranian official has called for the sterilization of female sex workers and homeless drug addicts in Tehran to prevent ‘social harm.’ Siavash Shahrivar, head of the Social and Cultural Affairs Department in the Tehran Governorate, said those women should be “convinced” to undergo sterilization. ‘There is a reality, a view, agreed on by many NGOs and the social elite, that if a woman is sick, and is also a sex worker and has no place to stay, she should be sterilized with her own approval, and not forcefully,’ Shahrivar was quoted as saying on January 1 by Iranian media.” ([Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#))

January 2: British woman jailed in Iran released from solitary confinement

“A British-Iranian woman being held in an Iranian prison has been released from solitary confinement, her husband has said. Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, 37, was sentenced in September to five years in prison on secret charges related to a ‘soft overthrow’ of the country’s government that were not revealed in open court. She had been restricted from any contact with fellow inmates at Tehran’s Evin prison until a week ago, when she was moved to a general ward, Richard Ratcliffe, her husband, told the BBC.” ([The Guardian](#))

Iraq

December 21: Trauma of Islamic State rule follows Iraqi women out of Mosul

“One wrong word to an Islamic State fighter in Mosul last year was all it took to set in motion a harrowing chain of events for an Iraqi woman who became so traumatized that she trembled in fear even after escaping the group's control. The widowed mother was being vetted to receive a pension from the ultra-hardline Islamists a few months after they seized the northern city in 2014 and turned it into the Iraqi capital of their self-styled caliphate.” ([Reuters](#))

December 28: Iraqi women join battle against Islamic State

“Miad Jubouri, an Iraqi mother of five who joined the ranks of the Iraqi forces battling the Islamic State (IS), has been participating in the battle as part of the Lions of the Tigris faction for the past two years. In a patriotic and conservative Iraqi society, Jubouri’s fight alongside the male-dominated Iraqi security forces has caught the attention of both the community and the media. The number of women who have joined the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) have increased, totaling roughly 3,000 women.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

Israel

December 21: Ethiopian Israeli women appointed judges

“Two women from Israel’s Ethiopian community broke through the glass ceiling on Tuesday, December 29 becoming the first to be appointed judges. They were among six women who were included in the 13 new judicial appointments as judges and registrars serving in the district, magistrate’s and traffic courts in Haifa and Tel Aviv. Although there is no shortage of Ethiopian-Israeli lawyers, none had previously reached the bench.” ([Jerusalem Post](#))

December 28: Israel Grapples With Military’s Plan to Open Combat Roles to Women

“As more Israeli women push to join combat units, the military is opening more roles to them, but the moves have met resistance among some former soldiers and the religious community. The new combat openings for women are in part being driven by necessity. The army last year cut the mandatory length of service for male recruits by four months to just under three years. Women serve two years, unless they are in a combat unit in which case they serve the same time as men.” ([Wall Street Journal](#))

Jordan

December 31: Women at wheel of 'pink taxis' challenge Jordanian norms

"Nisrin Akoubeh checks the oil and water before getting into her taxi and pulling into Amman's heavy traffic for another day of shuttling fellow women across the capital. Akoubeh is one of a group of women who want to turn taxi driving into an acceptable profession for females, challenging Jordan's social norms. The 31-year-old widow and former nurse drives one of a fleet of 10 'Pink Taxis' driven by women for women passengers." ([Jordan Times](#))

Kuwait

December 25: National Assembly's female security force, victory for women empowerment

"The inclusion of female security personnel in the National Assembly's Guard is considered as another victory for women empowerment in Kuwait. After reaching several key positions within the public and private domains, the ambition to be included in the state's security and armed forces took years to achieve. With their determination and willingness to protect Kuwait, women finally attained their position alongside men in service of the country. Speaking in separate interviews, a number of female and male security personnel expressed their satisfaction with the current status quo, affirming that they were eager for more gains in the future." ([Kuwait Times](#))

Oman

December 26: Seven Women Win Seats on Oman's Municipal Council

"In the second-ever vote for the Oman Municipal Council on Sunday, December 25, 23 of the 731 candidates were women – 7 of whom secured seats on the Council. Although low, this number is higher than 2012, when only 4 women won seats. Two of the women, Mariam Al Shamsi and Latifa Al Manei, 'won the only seats for the Sunnainah province of the Braimi governorate' – the first time a province has been represented only by women." ([Gulf News](#))

December 29: Meet the first female officer in charge of an Oman police station

"For the first time in Oman's history, the Royal Oman Police has appointed a senior female police officer to be in charge of a police department. Lieutenant Colonel Shaikha bint Ashour Al Hambasiyah, the new head of Al Wattayah police station, said she was happy and thankful to be chosen for the historic appointment." ([Times of Oman](#))

Palestinian Territories

December 22: How Gaza's female first responders are saving lives, breaking stereotypes

"In an attempt to fight a patriarchal society that keeps hindering their progress in most of the fields they aspire to, Palestinian women are breaking with customs and traditions in a bid to prove that just like men, they have scientific capabilities and technical skills. This was the main incentive that led the Palestinian association of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) to allow female first-aid workers to cover the ongoing football Premier League for the first time, in a move to challenge society's perception of women's work in general and female first-aid workers in particular." ([Al-Monitor](#))

December 22: Gaza women cancer patients start hunger strike to protest Israel treatment ban

"Dozens of female cancer patients in Gaza began a hunger strike today to protest Israeli authorities' banning them from obtaining travel permits to travel to receive treatment. During a protest attended by dozens of cancer patients in front of the Ministry of Civil Affairs in Gaza this morning (December 22), the Aid and Hope Programme for Cancer Patient Care in Gaza condemned senior health official Bassam Al-Badri for humiliating and offending cancer patients." ([Middle East Monitor](#))

December 27: Gaza to hear appeal of woman's death sentence

"In a statement issued December 18, an alliance of Palestinian nongovernmental organizations is calling on the Palestinian judiciary to consider the effects of domestic violence as a woman appeals her death sentence in the slaying of her husband. The case is the first in which the death penalty has been issued against a Palestinian woman since the Palestinian Authority was established in 1994." ([Al-Monitor](#))

Qatar

December 20: Qatarisation Strategies Found To Be Failing Female Nationals

"Despite Qatari women represent about half of the national workforce, women are not a priority in the private sector Qatarisation strategies plan. According to a survey done by Oxford Strategic Consulting, 'about 36 percent of companies either never or sometimes actively promote female nationals as part of their strategy.'" ([Gulf Business](#))

Saudi Arabia

December 22: Saudi women dismiss link drawn between work and divorce

"Saudi working women have launched a social media hashtag to reject links between the rise in divorce figures and the trend of women taking up employment. A report published this week by the General Authority for Statistics said that the number of divorces among women who held jobs was 72,895 while the figure among women who did not work was 14,856, indicating that working women were more likely to be divorced than non-working wives." ([Gulf News](#))

December 26: Music clip of Skateboarding niqab-clad women takes Saudi Arabia by storm

"A new music video showing niqab-clad local women skating, playing basketball, singing and dancing is taking Saudi Arabia by storm. The song and music clip titled 'Hwages' (roughly translated as concerns in English) was uploaded on YouTube on December 23 and has gained more nearly half a million views since then. The video opens to a scene showing three women wearing the niqab entering a car while a young boy takes the front steering wheel, in a nod to Saudi Arabia's ban on women driving." ([Al Arabiya](#))

December 30: Saudi Arabia jails man for a year after he publically called for end of male control over women

"A Saudi man has been jailed for a year after he called for an end to the ultra-conservative Islamic kingdom's male guardianship system. The unnamed man was also fined 30,000 riyals (£6,500) after being convicted of 'inciting to end guardianship of women,' the daily Okaz newspaper reported. He was arrested while putting up posters inside mosques which called for the government to abolish strict rules giving men control over women." ([The Independent](#))

Syria

December 24: Dire conditions for Syrian refugees on Jordan's border

"The conditions at Rukban, a remote and arid part of the desert in northeastern Jordan, have been troubling for a while, with no toilets, running water or electricity since the informal camp sprang up more than a year ago. Nearly 95 percent of households do not have enough food, according to a needs assessment conducted by World Vision International, and some people are reported to have sold their tents just to buy something to eat. Dwellings are makeshift and unable to withstand the increasingly harsh, cold weather conditions. Medical care has been almost non-existent, and only five to six litres of water for each person is available every day – about a third of the international standard. Around three-quarters of the residents are women and children." ([Al Jazeera](#))

Tunisia

December 22: Tunisia breaks up women terrorists' cell

"Tunisia said on Thursday, December 22 it has smashed a terror cell and arrested several suspects, including women. In a statement, the Ministry of Interior said two females – a 17-year-old and an 18-year-old - were arrested whilst the third one is already in custody being a suspect in another terror-related case." ([Al Arabiya](#))

Turkey

December 22: Turkey's GDP could soar 20 percent if women's participation in labor force doubled

"Turkey can increase its GDP 20 percent by 2025 if it can boost the average number of women in the labor force from 30 percent to the OECD average at 63 percent, according to a study by worldwide management consulting firm McKinsey & Company in cooperation with the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD)." ([Hurriyet Daily News](#))

Yemen

December 27: Yemen war: Women play growing role for anti-Houthi forces

"Shoulder to shoulder with male fighters stand Ra'afa Abdullah and Riam al-Ra'awi at the southwestern entrance to Taiz to inspect the women who come to the city from different areas and provinces. The checkpoint is the only entrance to the besieged city. Abdullah and her friend do not need to take up arms. Their duty is to check passengers for weapons and suspicious items." ([Middle East Eye](#))

Opinion/Analysis

2016: A Difficult Year for Moroccan Women (Chaima Lahsini)

"Another year has gone by, and the fight for women's rights in Morocco is still relentless. 2016 has been quite the eventful year, albeit a gruesome one for Moroccan women. As one sorts through every piece of news and events related to women issues this year, the lack of good accounts is baffling. Cases of rape, murder and violence have piled up, while actions against perpetrators of abuse have been very scarce." ([Morocco World News](#))

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