

MENA Women's News Brief

December 29, 2014 – January 12, 2015

January 2: (Op-Ed) How Will Women in the Middle East Fare in 2015? By Haleh Esfandiari

“As we start the new year my optimism and faith in women are stronger than my pessimism. Awareness of their rights is rising among Middle Eastern women of all classes, especially among the young. Given this awareness and the persistent denial of their rights, I believe that Middle Eastern women will continue to fight religious extremists and autocrats and that, in the end, they will prevail.” ([Wall Street Journal Think Tank Blog](#))

Bahrain

December 29: UN experts urge Bahrain to drop charges against women activists

“A group of United Nations human rights experts are urging the government of Bahrain to drop charges against three women human rights activists exercising their rights to free expression and free association. ‘All three activists have been detained or sentenced purely for their criticism of government authorities,’ the independent experts said in a statement released December 29, 2014. ‘Such criticism is not only fully legitimate according to Bahrain’s obligations under human rights law; it is also essential to the free and public debate necessary for a healthy civil society.’ The three activists include two sisters Ms. Maryam Al-Khawaja and Ms. Zainab Al-Khawaja, and Ms. Ghada Jamsheer. The experts commenting on the matter include Mads Andenas, Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; David Kaye, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; and Maina Kiai, Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.” ([UN News Centre](#))

Egypt

December 29: 1,191 reported sexual harassment cases in 100 days: Report

“At least 1,191 cases of sexual assault and harassment took place across Egypt during the second ‘100 days of al-Sisi’s rule,’ covering a time frame between 17 September to 25 December. The figures came as part of a year-end report prepared by the Appropriate Communication Techniques (ACT) independent organization and the ‘I Saw Harassment’ civil pressure group. The report said it only traced reported cases and those that were made public in the media. It put Alexandria on top of the list with the highest number of incidents (425), representing over 35 percent of the total, in comparison to Cairo (364) and Giza (58).” ([Daily News Egypt](#))

Iran

December 29: IRIB chief names woman as deputy for radio affairs

“The head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) has picked a woman as his deputy for radio affairs. Mohammad Sarafraz on Saturday, December 27 appointed Nasrin Abravani as his deputy to regulate radio affairs of Iran's broadcasting service. Abravani is the first woman ever appointed to the post. She replaces Mohammad Hossein Sufi who assumed the post in 2008.” ([Payvand](#))

January 2: Rise in young women drug addicts triggers alarm in Iran

“Shisheh — a high-purity crystalline methamphetamine — has become the second most popular drug after opium among young people seeking an escape from social and economic hardship. However,

addiction is increasingly spreading across all social classes and affecting a rising number of women — a trend triggering alarm in the government. The problem was first revealed in a 2011 study on the prevalence of addiction, says Zahra Bonianian, an adviser to the state-run Drug Control Headquarters for women and family affairs. ‘It was when we realised that the number of married female addicts was going up, the age of addiction going down while the educational level [of addicts] was high.’” ([Financial Times](#))

January 3: Iran's Women's Affairs Chief Feels Powerless To Act

“Shahindokht Molaverdi, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's Deputy of Women's and Family Affairs, was quoted as saying: ‘As a member of the cabinet, I have no knowledge of what general policies have been proposed to the Expediency Council by the Planning Organization.’ Molaverdi slammed the Rouhani administration for creating obstacles for the slightest activities of the Women's Affairs office. She added that most ministries do not allow Women's Affairs advisers to take part in administrative meetings.” ([Payvand](#))

Iraq

December 31: Shi'ite militias expand influence, redraw map in central Iraq

“Behind black gates and high walls, Iraqi national security agents watch 200 women and children. Boys and girls play in the yard and then dart inside their trailers, located in a former U.S. military camp and one time headquarters for Saddam Hussein’s officials in Babel province’s capital Hilla. The women and children are unwilling guests, rounded up as they fled with their male relatives in October from Jurf al-Sakhr, a bastion of Islamic State, during a Shi’ite militia and military operation to clear the farming community. Once they were arrested, security forces separated out the men, accusing them of being Islamic State fighters. They have not been heard from since. Security forces say the women and children are being investigated, but have not been brought to court.” ([Reuters](#))

Lebanon

December 31: Lebanese women not safe despite domestic violence law

“The Lebanese parliament passed a new law on domestic violence April 1... Two days after the vote on the law, Human Rights Watch declared the legislation ‘good, but incomplete.’ Maya Ammar, Kafa [Enough] Violence Against Women’s media officer, shared this opinion, telling Al-Monitor, ‘This is a big step for women's rights, but it is not enough.’ According to Ammar, the only real breakthrough is that the law simplifies some legal mechanisms. Among the undesirable changes made to the original text is the provision involving marital rape, which is now ‘marital rights by force’ and is condemned only if it involves physical evidence of violence.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

January 2: (Op-Ed) Female journalists fight gender discrimination

“Journalism in Lebanon has witnessed a number of changes. Chief among these is the extent of women’s fingerprints on the ‘products’ of the profession. Reports examining this issue no longer focus on the emergence of women journalists, as this first occurred a hundred years ago. What is currently being highlighted, however, is women’s widespread presence in the profession and its institutions, which only began almost two decades ago. Let us explore this in the context of globalization.” ([Al-Hayat via Al-Monitor](#))

Oman

January 7: Shelter from the storm of abuse for women in Oman

“A shelter for women who suffer from physical abuse has been opened by the Ministry of Social Development amid reports that assaults are on the rise. A reliable source at the Ministry confirmed that the hostel has been opened but will shelter only national females and expatriate women married to Omani nationals. It comes after repeated calls for help from women suffering abuse, said Shukoor Al Ghamri, former president of Omani Women Association, who vowed that solving the issue of violence against women in Oman was one of the priorities of the association. ‘The association had proposed the idea unofficially to establish a temporary hostel for abused women since we were getting more and more complaints of abuse. The request had gone to the Ministry of Social Development long ago,’ said Al Ghamri.” ([Times of Oman](#))

Palestinian Territories

January 1: Palestinian TV to raise awareness of violence against women and girls

“A comedy series and a ‘Judge Judy’-style show will be among the programmes aired across the Palestinian territories in 2015, as part of a multimedia project to raise awareness of, and seek to prevent, violence against women and girls. The Ma’an Network, an independent, non-profit media organisation that broadcasts across the West Bank and Gaza, will use a £730,000 grant from the UK government to air shows that tackle often taboo subjects, such as marital rape, over the next three years.” ([The Guardian](#))

UAE

January 5: Fair Pay: Do UAE men, women earn same?

“According to IMA’s (Institute of Management Accountants) 2014 Salary Survey, we can witness a narrowing in the gender pay gap in the UAE, although some disparity still exists. The survey of 131 IMA members in the UAE found average base salaries for women (\$53,222) in the UAE are 97 per cent of those for men (\$54,938). In the UAE, the average total compensation package for women (\$60,792) was 85 per cent of that of their male counterparts (\$71,856). The UAE was broadly in line with the global figure of 83 percent.” ([Emirates24/7](#))

Yemen

December 29: Al-Sammad: State pays special attention to women


“President Advisor Saleh al-Sammad has said the state is paying special attention to woman for participation in public and political life. In his meeting held Monday, December 29 with the representatives of a number of female components and activists who defend woman's rights, al-Sammad said woman's participation and enabling her to have leading posts within issues discussed in the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) when all political components unanimously agreed on rising woman's participation in all leading posts into 30 percent.” ([Saba News](#))

January 1: Defying the expected: Yemeni women in the formal economy

“Accustomed to dealing only with men in shops, Sana’anis have different reactions to finding a woman like Lena Ahmed, the manager of ‘Queens Shop,’ serving them. ‘Different kinds of customers come to our store. Some express their surprise or congratulate me. Others say I am not a Yemeni. I don’t care about the negative criticism because not everyone holds the same opinion,’ says Ahmed.” ([Yemen Times](#))

By **Julia Craig Romano**

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