

# MENA Women News Brief

March 1 - March 15, 2017

In celebration of International Women's Day 2017, the Middle East Program, the Global Women's Leadership Initiative, and Women in Public Service Project at the Wilson Center collected essays from 33 women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the United States, and elsewhere to mark the occasion. ([Read here](#))

## **Algeria**

### **March 9: Women's day in Algeria met with arrests**

"Algerian activists who had gathered to mark International Women's Day yesterday, March 8, were forced to disperse and arrested by large swathes of police as they demonstrated. Activists from the Tharwa Fadhma N'Soumer and Djazairouna associations had gathered near the Grande Poste in Algiers to denounce inequality in Algerian society and pay tribute to the women who died during the black decade of Algeria's 1990's civil war." ([Middle East Monitor](#))

## **Egypt**

### **March 3: Egypt proposes inheritance protections for women**

"With some help from the government, Egyptian women might finally get their due, at least as far as inheritances are concerned. Currently, Egypt has no sanctions in place to punish someone who keeps members of a family from receiving their rightful shares of an inheritance. The problem is not uncommon for women, especially in Upper Egypt and some rural areas." ([Al-Monitor](#))

### **March 6: Egypt appoints female imams to help fight extremism**

"Egypt is trying a new tactic to prevent extremist groups fighting the Egyptian state from winning women to their side. The Egyptian Religious Endowments Ministry, which supervises the country's 108,000 mosques, said the plan includes appointing female preachers for the first time to teach women about moderate Islam." ([Middle East Online](#))

### **March 10: Egyptian initiative encourages young women to travel the world – alone**

"In an attempt to break social and psychological barriers that prevent young Egyptian women from traveling the world by themselves, Shaima Ali, an employee of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, launched the initiative 'Travel with Shee' in August 2015. The platform encourages women of all social classes and ages to inspire other women by sharing their travel stories of trips on their own or with their families." ([Al-Monitor](#))

## **Iran**

### **March 8: 'I'm proud of my sin': the 'criminal' stars of Iranian TV promoting women's rights**

"Two years ago, producers decided to try and create a new show for women – one that hadn't ever been done before. They hired two renowned Iranian human rights activists, Faghihimani and Darya Safai, plus two staff hosts, Tina Ghazimorad and Azadeh Shafiee. Like The View, the four sit and chat about women's issues, welcome guests and share stories about their lives. The first show aired on 23 October 2016 – and it didn't take long for them to be accused of criminality." ([The Guardian](#))

### **March 10: Iran sanctions burden falls heavily on women**

“The nuclear deal signed between Iran and the West in 2015 began the process of dismantling the sanctions imposed on Iran which were crippling the country’s already fragile economy. [...] But it is the women of Iran who bear the brunt of the hardships these policies cause – namely, increasing poverty, unemployment, malnourishment, and the predominance of temporary forms of employment contract.” ([People's World](#))

### **March 12: Iran’s paramilitary unit recruits women in Kurdish provinces**

“The Iranian militia group known as the Basij has stepped up recruitment of women in Kurdish provinces west of the country, several sources have told Rudaw. The new round of enlistments follow Tehran’s earlier move to recruit local people in remote Kurdish areas as ‘border guards’ amid an escalation of tensions between the Islamic Republic and the armed Kurdish groups opposed to Tehran.” ([Rudaw](#))

## **Iraq**

### **March 12: 150 women freed from Daesh prison in Iraq’s Mosul**

“A total of 150 women were freed from the Daesh terror organization as Iraqi security forces recaptured a factory in one of Mosul city’s western neighborhoods. Said Memozini, Mosul representative of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), said that Daesh turned the old cotton factory in Hayy Wadi Hajar neighborhood into a prison, locking hundreds of women in the building.” ([Daily Sabah](#))

### **March 13: Female Iraqi MP proposes law that encourages men to marry multiple women for financial benefits**

“A member of Iraq’s parliament has put forward a proposal to legalise polygamy in the country to ‘protect the dignity’ of widows, divorced women, and older women who choose not to marry. The government could provide financial incentives such as tax allowances to encourage men to marry more than one woman, Jamila al-Ebeidi told media at Baghdad’s parliament’s building on Sunday, March 12, citing increased rates of divorce as a social problem which puts women in financially dangerous positions.” ([Independent](#))

## **Israel**

### **March 6: Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics published report ahead of International Women’s Day**

“Monday, March 6, 2 days before International Women’s Day, the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) published data regarding women’s role in Israel as of 2017. The data shows that at the end of 2015, more than 3 million women over the age of 15 lived in Israel and women’s life expectancy was 84.1 compared to men’s 80.1. A worrying statistic shows that despite women making up 48.3 percent of the workforce in the market, their monthly salaries are lower than men’s salaries by 31.7 percent.” ([Jerusalem Online](#))

### **March 9: Israeli Minister Blocks Women’s Day Event in East Jerusalem, Citing Palestinian Authority Ties**

“Israeli police raided an East Jerusalem hotel on Wednesday, March 8, to stop a cultural event for local Palestinian women, scheduled for International Women’s Day. Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan issued an order preventing the performance, on the grounds that it was organized by the Palestinian Authority. [...] The event’s organizers denied that it was connected to the PA and stressed that its purpose was to give women living in East Jerusalem a break from the daily grind.” ([Haaretz](#))

### **March 10: Israeli and Palestinian women march together for peace**

"In part of the world where barriers are all too real, Israeli and Palestinian women are breaking them down. Dozens on each side of the divide took part in a protest on Friday, March 10, on the outskirts of Jerusalem. They smashed down an improvised wall in a strong symbolic gesture and then marched together, escorted by Israeli security forces. All the women taking part know the cost of the conflict only too well. They have all lost an immediate family member." ([Euronews](#))

### **Jordan**

#### **March 8: Jordan marks women's day with advancing struggle for gender equality**

"Women's rights activists in Jordan are marking International Women's Day by renewing their calls to increase women's political participation and ensure gender equality in all spheres. The Kingdom is celebrating International Women's Day, marked on March 8, with the slogan: 'Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030.'" ([Jordan Times](#))

#### **March 12: Majority of unemployed women want to work – study**

"A UN study on Jordanian and Syrian refugee women published on Sunday, March 12, indicated that almost half of those who are unemployed would work if they had the opportunity. The study's findings were presented at the launch of the report 'Women Working: Jordanian and Syrian Refugee Women's Labour Force Participation and Attitudes Towards Employment (2016)'" ([Jordan Times](#))

### **Lebanon**

#### **March 3: Arab World's First Ordained Female Pastor is Historic**

"Rola Sleiman made history. She now carries the title of 'Reverend' of the Presbyterian Church, the first woman to be ordained in a Middle Eastern Church on February 26, 2017 in Tripoli, Lebanon. Her ordination was 'an act of love and justice,' those present at the ceremony heard in the sermon, and her comment to journalists after the ceremony was 'Christ's justice has been finally fulfilled.'" ([Huffington Post](#))

### **Libya**

#### **March 5: Amnesty warns east not to discriminate against women in new travel ban**

"International human rights organisation Amnesty International has warned the authorities in the east of Libya not use their new travel ban on 18 to 45-year-olds to discriminate against women. Ten days ago, Major General Abdul Razzaq Al-Nazhuri, the LNA's chief of staff and military governor between Ben Jawad and Derna, said that men as well as women between the ages of 18 and 45 would in future require permission from security officials to travel abroad." ([Libya Herald](#))

### **Morocco**

#### **March 3: Gender Diversity to Pump \$30 Billion in Moroccan GDP by 2025**

"Morocco could unlock a GDP of up to \$30 billion by 2025 by capitalizing on its strong potential for gender diversity in business, according to the consulting firm McKinsey. Sandra Sancier-Sultan, Senior Associate Director at the consulting firm, presented this prediction as part of the results of her study 'Women Matter,' which investigated the representation of women in positions of leadership in Moroccan companies." ([Morocco World News](#))

#### **March 11: Gender Wage Gap: Moroccan Women Make 17 percent Less Than Men**

"Despite the decline in wage gaps between the sexes in both academic and professional sectors, the statistics are not reassuring. According to the study of gender equality, public policies and economic

growth in Morocco, women are mainly hired in low-productivity sectors for low-skilled and low-paid jobs.” ([Morocco World News](#))

## **Oman**

### **March 7: Omani woman pushed boundaries to carve out her niche**

“There were no women studying in my field at the time of my education. In Oman, we only had a minority of female geologists,’ and the same could be said in the United States. “This was not a Middle Eastern issue, or an Omani issue. It was a global issue,” recalls Intisaar Al Kindy. Al Kindy has served as PDO’s Exploration Director since 2011, and is one of a handful of female executives working in Oman’s engineering field.” ([Times of Oman](#))

### **March 11: Focus on capacity building among Omani women**

“Concerned with the role of women in the society, the Omani Woman Association (OWA) runs many social and educational programmes. One such programme was organised by the Omaniya Cultural Salon at OWA to promote girls’ capabilities and develop their talents.” ([Times of Oman](#))

## **Qatar**

### **March 2: Meet the Qatari women making waves in the film industry**

“A young emerging filmmaker, Rawda Al Thani exudes a great deal of confidence. She may only have one completed short film to her name, and one in the works, but Al Thani knows where she’s going. The 23-year-old is among the 11 Qatari filmmakers taking part in Qumra 2017, a Doha Film Institute (DFI) initiative that looks to support and promote local and regional filmmakers.” ([Gulf News](#))

### **March 8: 'Fifth GCC Women Games' officially kicks off in Qatar**

“The 5th GCC Women Games officially kicked off on Tuesday, March 7 under the auspices of the Vice-Chairperson and CEO of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development Sheikha Hind Bint Hamad al-Thani. [...] A total of 891 sportswomen and administrative and technical teams representing four GCC countries, namely Kingdom of Bahrain, Sultanate of Oman, the United Arab Emirates and the host – State of Qatar are participating in the games” ([Zawya](#))

## **Palestinian Territories**

### **March 2: Palestinian media outlets commit to more coverage of women’s affairs**

“The Palestinian Ministry of Women’s Affairs, in collaboration with local media, is deploying major efforts to encourage the media to address social affairs, and women’s affairs in particular, in an attempt to change stereotypes and how society views Palestinian women. On Dec. 5, 2016, 17 public and private Palestinian media organizations in Ramallah signed a charter of honor prepared by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, to launch a safe media network that supports social issues and women’s affairs.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

### **March 8: Gaza's women of steel**

“At 42 percent, Gaza has the world's highest unemployment rate - and while the rate of women in the workforce is only 15 percent, compared to 71 percent of men, many of them are trying to close the gap. More and more women are breaking societal norms and working in jobs that have been traditionally reserved for men as they step up to serve as their family's breadwinners. Al Jazeera spoke with three women about how their non-traditional jobs have changed their lives.”

([Al Jazeera](#))

### **March 8: Palestinian women earn substantially less than Palestinian men, report finds**

“The average wage of Palestinian women stands at 73 percent of that of Palestinian men, a Palestinian Authority Central Bureau of Statistics report found. Palestinian women receive an average salary of NIS 83.3 daily, whereas Palestinian men earn NIS 114.1, the report found. The report, published on the occasion of International Women’s Day, sheds light on inequality between men and women in the workplace.” ([The Jerusalem Post](#))

### **March 9: Sharp spike in Palestinian women arrests**

“The number of Palestinian women being arrested by Israeli forces in 2016 has more than doubled than the previous year, the Palestinian Prisoners’ Club (PPC) has said. Occupation forces arrested 170 women in 2016, a sharp spike compared to 85 women arrested in 2015. There are currently 56 women in Israeli jails, 16 of which are under the age of 18 and 11 of which suffer from bronchial diseases.” ([Gulf News](#))

## **Saudi Arabia**

### **March 6: Female Saudi horse trainer sees hope for women**

“Dana al-Gosaibi's passion for horses has been hard to pursue in Saudi Arabia, where conservatives resist women's involvement in sport. But the Islamic kingdom's tentative advancement of women's rights has given the Saudi horse trainer hope that one day she might be able to realise her dream of starting her own business. ‘There is this very weird belief that a woman shouldn't ride a horse,’ Gosaibi says, especially if she is not yet married as ‘she might lose her virginity.’” ([Al-Monitor](#))

### **March 8: Saudi female boxer urges women to fight for their goals**

“Women should persevere to reach their goals, Saudi female kickboxing and boxing trainer Halah Al-Hamrani told Arab News on the eve of International Women’s Day [...]. ‘Women should go for their passions. There will be difficult times, but they should overcome those challenges with determined effort,’ said Al-Hamrani, the only Saudi female kickboxing and boxing trainer in the Kingdom.” ([Arab News](#))

### **March 12: Saudi Arabia women unite to inspire new generation**

“Saudi women from adventurers to inventors are hoping a unique conference in Riyadh on Saturday, March 11, will highlight their changing role and inspire younger women to push for new opportunities in the ultra-conservative kingdom. The event comes at a time when reforms are slowly changing women’s lives in one of the world’s most gender-segregated countries - where women live under the supervision of a male guardian and cannot drive.” ([The Nation](#))

### **March 12: 113 women in Saudi diplomatic corps**

“The number of female diplomats employed in the Saudi Foreign Ministry – working inside and outside Saudi Arabia – has risen to 113, said Osama Nugali, the ministry’s spokesman. The foreign minister announces diplomatic positions annually, with applicants hired based on the required qualifications, Nugali told Arab News.” ([Arab News](#))

## **Syria**

### **March 5: In Syria, the extra weak link of women’s health**

“Fatima, 25, was at her home in eastern Aleppo with her three children when the first barrel bomb struck. [...] Fatima, who was three months’ pregnant at the time of the bombing, suffered a miscarriage and internal bleeding, leaving her in critical condition and on life support. Dr Zaher Sahloul, Fatima’s critical-care doctor, uses his patient’s story to illustrate how the conflict in Syria is crippling maternal

health care, with thousands of women suffering as warplanes systematically wipe out medical facilities, and blockades leave hospitals with almost no equipment or resources." ([Gulf News](#))

## **Tunisia**

### **March 6: Young, Tunisian, Female And A Digital Auto-Entrepreneur**

"I prefer not to tell people my age at first – people tend to not take me seriously because I am a young woman. If you see the laws on the books in Tunisia, everything is equal. It's not like women are not expected to study or work. But there are limits. If you are seen as being too bold, trying to breaking the stereotypes or the glass ceiling, you would raise concerns." ([Huffington Post](#))

### **March 8: Tunisian rights groups offer solace to victims of violence against women**

"Violence against women is widespread in Tunisia, where 47.6 percent of women between the ages of 18 and 64 have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime, according to a 2010 report. In an effort to tackle the problem, Tunisia's parliament is currently debating a bill that would strengthen laws against gender-based violence." ([France24](#))

## **Turkey**

### **March 5: Turkish women for and against more power for Erdogan rally in Istanbul**

"Thousands of pro-government women filled an Istanbul arena Sunday, March 5, in support of a 'Yes' vote in next month's referendum on boosting Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's powers. Waving Turkish flags, women shouted 'Of course, Yes!' ahead of the April 16 vote on constitutional changes that would give Turkey an executive presidency similar to political systems in France or the United States. [...] Opponents, however, say the changes that would grant sweeping new powers to the head of state would make parliament dysfunctional and promote a one-man model." ([Public Radio International](#))

### **March 6: Turkish development agency supports women worldwide**

"Turkey's international development aid agency is supporting shelter for women at risk of violence around the world as well as giving women vocational skills courses, according to a statement by the agency. With its numerous aid and development projects around the globe, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) has not forgotten the needs of the world's women, said the statement released Monday, March 6." ([Anadolu News Agency](#))

### **March 8: Knife-wielding group attacks women's day event at Turkish university**

"A group of 30-40 people wielding knives attacked students celebrating International Women's Day on a university campus in central Istanbul, injuring some participants. A tent set up to mark the event was attacked by the assailants and there were reported injuries caused by stab wounds at the private Bilgi University after the assailants jumped over turnstiles and entered the campus illegally." ([Middle East Eye](#))

## **United Arab Emirates**

### **March 6: 2 UAE women pilot world's biggest plane**

"On the upcoming celebration of International Women's Day this week, Emirates has turned the spotlight on its female staff. The UAE-based carrier released a footage on Monday, March 6, for a brief behind-the-scenes look at two Arab women piloting the world's largest passenger aircraft. Shown operating the cockpit are Emirati national Alia Al Muhairi, the UAE's youngest female Airbus A380 pilot and Nevin Darwish from Egypt, the first Arab female pilot to have captained an A380 plane." ([Gulf News](#))

### **March 13: UAE initiative supports Syrian refugees in Jordan**

“The Tailoring Workshop of our Mother Fatima, an initiative announced in August last year, has been opened to empower women and families hosted by the Emirati-Jordanian camp for Syrian refugees. ‘Any lady in the camp can now sew clothes for herself and her family, thanks to the machines provided through the initiative,’ said Um Ali, a woman refugee from the camp, according to UAE News Agency (WAM). [...] The initiative was announced last year by Shaikha Lubna bint Khalid Al Qasimi, Minister of State for Tolerance and President of Zayed University.” ([Bahrain News Agency](#))

## **Yemen**

### **March 8: Yemeni women protesters urge end to Saudi aggression, siege**

“During Wednesday’s [March 8] protest that coincided with International Women's Day, the participants asked local and international organizations to stand by the Yemeni citizens and help provide vital supplies to the people. The protesters were holding banners reading, ‘Yemeni women die due to war and siege,’ ‘Millions in Yemen have no access to prescribed medicine,’ and, ‘When will the international community break the silence toward Yemen siege?’” ([Press TV](#))

### **March 8: On International Women’s Day: A Yemeni Female Writes About Her Abduction Story With French Aid Worker in Sana’a**

“The National Yemen website is publishing the first letter of the Yemeni abducted female, Shereen Makaw who was abducted with the French aid worker in Sana’a two years ago. On February 24th, 2015, Makawi was abducted by unknown Yemeni gunmen along with her French workmate Isabelle Prime, from the street in Sana’a, while they were in their way to work.” ([National Yemen](#))

### **March 12: Yemen's quiet revolution as women enter the shopfloor**

“Wafaa al-Zikri, 24, was forced to abandon her university studies and look for work to support her mother and four younger siblings. Her father died of kidney failure before the war and local charities withdrew their financial assistance. [...] Since the civil war broke out in early 2015, many women have found themselves the sole breadwinner for their families after local charities, overwhelmed by requests for help, closed their doors.” ([Middle East Eye](#))

## **Regional**

### **March 8: Starving for life: Arab women open up about eating disorders**

“The amount of studies on eating disorders in the Middle East is shockingly disproportionate to the actual effect of eating disorders within the region. Like with most mental illnesses, eating disorders are considered a taboo within Arab communities. However, the obsession with weight and scrutinisation of the appearance of girls and women are overly discussed.” ([Middle East Monitor](#))

### **March 8: International Women's Day: 9 most powerful Arab women in the world**

“Iron-willed, charismatic, eloquent and steadfast in progress, these ladies epitomise what women can do in any field given the opportunity to do so. Be it business, government and policy, law, or art and media, these Arab women are at the top of the global lists of powerful individuals.” ([Gulf News](#))

### **March 11: What’s Holding Arab Women Back From Achieving Equality?**

“No country in the world has achieved full gender equality, but the Arab region — a diverse grouping of 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa — ranks lowest in the world, according to the 2016 Global Gender Gap Report. Despite some advances in women’s economic equality in Qatar, Algeria and the United Arab Emirates, at the present rate, the region’s 39 percent gender gap (compared to 33

percent in South Asia and 32 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa) will take another 356 years to close.”  
([Huffington Post](#))

**In Arab World, Women's Fight for Equal Rights Is Being Won on the Battlefield**

“Iraq’s first female tribal leader won much respect after she left her job to join anti-Islamic State forces in the Salah al-Din district of northwestern Iraq. Most of the photographs of Umayyah Naji Jabara show her smiling while holding a Kalashnikov rifle. But she was felled by an ISIS sniper’s bullet in June 2014.” ([Haaretz](#))

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