

MENA Women News Brief

November 3, 2015 –November 17, 2015

Egypt

November 3: Will new Egyptian employment law help its women lean in?

“Nearly five years after the revolution, Egyptian women still face much the same obstacles in the workforce as the economy continues to limp along without their full participation. The Egyptian government is working on a new labor law to offer workers, especially women, more rights, and its provisions are being finalized.” ([Al Monitor](#))

November 4: Coalition calls for ‘popular uprising’ to release 66 women held in Egypt

“The Revolutionary Coalition for Egyptian Women called for a ‘strong popular uprising’ on Tuesday, November 3 to force the authorities to release 66 women who have been imprisoned on the basis of accusations which the government refer to as ‘criminal’ while the coalition considers them ‘political.’” ([Middle East Monitor](#))

November 5: Uber drivers in Egypt to get anti-sexual harassment training

“In an effort to counter one of Egypt’s biggest social issues, U.S.-based ride service Uber is rolling out a scheme that will train drivers in the capital Cairo to take steps against sexual harassment. The private car service announced it will be teaming up with Harassmap—an online social initiative which employs an SMS system for reporting incidences of sexual harassment in Egypt—to educate its drivers against the social issue.” ([Al Arabiya](#))

November 9: Egypt electoral law a step toward justice for women

“The Egyptian electoral law allocated 56 parliamentary seats to women in addition to 14 others appointed by the president, ensuring that 70 women would reach the parliament. The law allows women to compete for all individual seats in order to guarantee them proper representation in parliament.” ([Al Monitor](#))

Iran

November 3: Iranian Activists Campaign To Bring More Women Into Parliament

“Iran's parliament has 290 seats, and only nine of them are filled by women. Women's rights activists want to change that. A group of Iranian activists is seeking to dilute the dominance of men in the country's parliament, pushing for a greater female presence in the legislature following elections in February 2016.” ([Radio Free Europe](#))

November 8: Iran appoints first woman ambassador since revolution

“Iran has appointed its first woman ambassador since the 1979 Islamic revolution, naming foreign ministry spokeswoman Marzieh Afkham to head its embassy in Malaysia. Iranian media first said back in April that Afkham was lined up for promotion to the rank of ambassador, but the reports were unconfirmed. Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif paid tribute to Afkham saying she had carried out her duties for two years as foreign ministry spokeswoman with ‘dignity, bravery and particular insight.’” ([Al Arabiya](#))

November 17: Hassan Rouhani's Women's Rights Conundrum (Op-ed by Haleh Esfandiari)

“When it comes to civil rights, including women’s rights, President Hassan Rouhani’s hands are tied. His reformist inclinations have been frustrated by conservative clerics, the security agencies, and right-wing members of parliament. Perhaps one of these days Mr. Rouhani will strike back at his opponents. He should hurry. He is up for reelection in February, and he will need women’s votes to win.” ([Wall Street Journal Think Tank Blog](#))

Iraq

November 6: Why Iraqi women are turning to the Internet to buy books

“Despite the devastation and rampant violence plaguing Iraq, there is some good news: women who find it difficult to leave their houses because of the deteriorating security situation and growing patriarchal restrictions are now pursuing their education from home, defying the conditions that they live in.” ([Al Monitor](#))

November 6: The Yazidi Women Who Escaped ISIS (Interviews by Seivan M. Salim)

“They are the survivors, these young women. Many were raped no matter what ruses they employed, or how much they pleaded. And, usually when they managed to get a hold of a cell phone, these few were able, one by one, to arrange to escape. With them they brought these accounts of brutality and duplicity that paint a never-before-published account of slavery under ISIS.” ([The Daily Beast](#))

November 14: Mass grave of Yazidi women executed by ISIS found in Iraq

“A mass grave believed to hold the remains of dozens of Yazidi women executed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) group was found Saturday, November 14, in northern Iraq, officials said. The grave, which has not yet been excavated, is located on the edge of the town of Sinjar and contains the bodies of some 78 women aged between 40 to around 80, according to younger women who had been enslaved by ISIS, witnessed the executions and later escaped.” ([Al Arabiya](#))

Israel

November 5: More Religious Jewish Women Joining the IDF

“The number of religious Jewish women volunteering for the Israeli army has almost doubled in the past five years. This according to a new report published by the IDF noting that while just 935 religious Jewish women signed up for military service in 2010, over 1,800 had already done so in 2015.” ([Israel Today](#))

November 13: Israel's AG Says Women Can Apply to Be Head of Rabbinical Courts

“Attorney General Yehuda Weinstein has overruled the position of Israel’s Sephardi chief rabbi in order to allow women to apply for the position of director general of the country’s rabbinical courts. Weinstein was ruling on a petition by Mavoi Satum and WIZO-Na’amat demanding that women be given a ‘substantial opportunity’ to contend for the post.” ([Haaretz](#))

Lebanon

November 5: Lebanese women demand right to grant citizenship to their children

“Dozens of Lebanese women and their children have joined protests in central Beirut Wednesday, November 4, demanding the Lebanese law be amended to allow women married to foreigners to pass their nationality to their children. The protest is part of a campaign titled ‘My nationality, a right for me

and my family.’ The participants held banners that read ‘nationality is not identification papers’ and ‘the mother is the origin.’” ([Middle East Monitor](#))

Oman

November 7: What does it take to get women elected to the Shura Council in Oman? (Op-ed by Saleh Shaibany)

“As women again miss the election bus with only one of them getting elected to the new Majlis Al Shura Council, the question, why it is still a formidable struggle for them to win seats, is coming back to haunt them. The lone woman in the male-dominated Majlis Al Shura has been re-elected for the second term which means none of the 21 female contenders got enough votes to see them through.” ([Times of Oman](#))

Palestinian Territories

November 6: New hotline offers support to Gaza’s blackmail victims

“The all-female police unit in Gaza launched a campaign in October dubbed ‘We Are With You’ to protect girls of high school age and older from blackmail by men and offer women support and protection from blackmail, a crime many are afraid to report.” ([Al Monitor](#))

Saudi Arabia

November 3: In Saudi Arabia, Women's Fitness Boom Defies Norms

“With blacked-out windows and a tiny sign, NuYu fitness center in Riyadh looks abandoned from the road. But inside it’s bustling, with Saudi women stripping off black abayas to reveal colorful athletic gear and pedaling furiously in a burlesque-themed spinning studio. Founded by a daughter of Saudi Arabia’s crown prince, the gym exemplifies the tensions inherent in women’s fitness in the Arab world’s biggest economy and birthplace of Islam.” ([Bloomberg](#))

November 4: Saudi Arabia bans women teachers from studying abroad over fear of Islamophobic attacks

“Female teachers and lecturers in Saudi Arabia have been banned from pursuing studies or scholarships abroad, reportedly due to fears of Islamophobic attacks on Muslim women. Saudi Arabia's education ministry has reportedly instructed all ministries to not enroll women lecturers and teachers into scholarships programs for studying abroad on the directive of the kingdom's Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al-Asheikh. The decision was taken in view of the murder of a Saudi woman in the United Kingdom last year.” ([International Business Times](#))

November 4: Why Saudi Arabia’s Women Have Suffrage in Name Only (Op-ed by Elizabeth Dickinson)

“A landmark change in law has given the Kingdom’s women the right to vote. But a host of cultural and legal barriers will prevent strong turnout at the polls. Low registration numbers are less a reflection of female interest than an indication of just how many barriers still stand in the way of Saudi women hoping to participate in public life. A registration process meant to empower women ended up being a reminder of the many ways female citizens are still held back.” ([Foreign Policy](#))

November 11: Even a little power is a welcome first step for Saudi suffragettes (Op-ed by Roula Khalaf)

“The municipal poll on Saturday, December 12 is the first time that women will vote and stand in a nationwide election, which is only the third voting experiment ever to be held in the conservative kingdom. It is, moreover, a partial election, with only half the seats for grabs, the rest appointed. And yet, instead of frustration, there was excitement in the faces of women running in the elections. For Saudi suffragettes, change comes at such a slow pace that every little step helps.” ([Financial Times](#))

November 15: Saudi Arabia to have four industrial cities for women

“The Saudi Organization for Industrial Estates and Technology Zones (MODON) is set to establish four new industrial cities in Jeddah, Yanbu, Qassim and Al-Jouf. MODON is in the process of coordinating with other parties to allocate industrial land to establish the cities, which will be designed specifically for women to work in. The Council of Ministers issued a new decision recently to allocate lands and areas inside cities to the establishment of industrial projects to employ women.” ([Arab News](#))

Syria

November 5: The Displaced - Hana (Story by Susan Dominus)

Susan Dominus followed Hana, a 12-year old displaced Syrian girl in order to share her story. “At 12, Hana has lived one-quarter of her life in a debilitating state of suspension as a Syrian refugee in Lebanon.” ([New York Times Magazine](#))

Tunisia

November 12: Tunisia - A Step Forward for Women’s Rights

“Tunisia’s parliament adopted a new law on Tuesday, November 10 that will allow women to travel with their minor children without getting permission from the children’s father. The Tunisian authorities should next ensure that all domestic laws conform to international standards and eliminate other forms of discrimination against women.” ([Human Rights Watch](#))

Turkey

November 3: Judge becomes first headscarf wearing woman to conduct a trial in Turkey

“A woman judge conducting a trial in the Istanbul 3rd Civil Court of Peace on Tuesday, November 3 became the first judge sitting in a trial to wear a headscarf. Although previously banned based on law, The High Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) had changed the regulation on June 1, 2015 to allow female judges wearing headscarves to conduct hearings.” ([Daily Sabah](#))

November 7: Biggest loser of November election – women (Op-ed by Zeynep Karatas)

“While the June election seemed encouraging with a 4 percent increase in female representation in Parliament from the previous 14 percent and election campaigning that highlighted the importance of women, the same results were not seen with the November snap election.” ([Today’s Zaman](#))

United Arab Emirates

November 13: Securing UAE women’s place in the economic space

“In the past 20 years, the UAE has seen significant social and economic change, the most notable being the role of women. To support and encourage these changes the UAE has instituted laws and a legal framework to safeguard women’s rights, improve the business and political climate for women, and to protect women from violence.” ([Gulf News](#))

Yemen

November 14: Travel Ban on Women's Rights Advocate

“Houthi officials in Yemen have barred a prominent women’s rights advocate, Dr. Shafiqah al-Wahsh, from traveling to preparatory peace talk meetings in the region, Human Rights Watch said. The Houthis, also known as Ansar Allah, should lift all travel restrictions on Dr. Wahsh, director of the semi-governmental Women’s National Committee of Yemen, and her colleagues to enable them to take part in dialogues abroad.” ([Human Rights Watch](#))

General

November 3: Women in development plan outlined

“An Intergovernmental Experts Group meeting kicked off on Tuesday, November 3, at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) General Secretariat in Jeddah to assess the implementation of the ‘OIC Action Plan for the Advancement of Women’ (OPAAW). It is expected that the closing session of the meeting will provide a comprehensive vision for the advancement of women and the role assigned to women in the development process.’ ([Bahrain News Agency](#))


November 11: Women most affected by regional challenges

“Women have borne the brunt of the negative effects of recent regional changes, according to Egyptian Minister of International Cooperation Sahar Nasr. The Arab region is going through successive political developments that have imposed various security, political and economical challenges on the region. Women, however, are the most affected by those challenges, as they are deprived of their basic rights such as education, political participation and employment, said Nasr.” ([Daily News Egypt](#))

By Nishaat Shaik



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