

MENA Women's News Brief

January 28-February 10, 2014

Bahrain

February 4: Women drivers 'could be forced to remove veils'

"Muslim women could be forced to remove their face veils during routine stops by traffic police in Bahrain... [However] General Directorate of Traffic legal affairs chief Lieutenant Colonel Khalid Buqais said the decision to give police the powers to make women remove their veils would be impossible in practice."

([Trade Arabia](#))

February 10: Women's rights in the spotlight

"Bahraini women have been facing new types of violence and discrimination since the unrest broke out in 2011, according to a key report compiled by a 14 non-government organizations." ([Gulf Daily News](#))

Egypt

January 30: Egyptian woman attacked in Tahrir Square as police watch, laugh

"On the anniversary of Egypt's Day of Rage, an Egyptian woman is subjected to the same police brutality her fellow citizens revolted against three years ago." ([Al-Monitor](#))

February 2: Introducing Egypt's new superhero: Qahera, fighting everything from misogyny to Islamophobia

"Qahera, a new web-based comic heroine who fights social problems affecting women in Egypt, is on a mission to combat "misogyny and Islamophobia, among other things," said 19-year-old comic designer Deena Mohamed, whose work is presented in Arabic and English." ([Al-Bawaba](#))

February 3: Sexual harassment leads Egyptian women to martial arts

"The *Shoft Tahrosh* (I Saw Harassment) movement in Egypt has launched campaigns that teach women how to defend themselves, following a steep increase in sexual harassment." ([Al-Monitor](#))

Iran

February 2: Iranian women fight efforts to restrict travel abroad

"On November 19, 2013, Majles (parliament) passed a bill [that] required single women to obtain a notarized permit from their father or male guardian each time they were to depart the country... The new requirement angered many women, women's rights activists and even a few female parliament members." ([Al-Monitor](#))

February 7: Iranian women footballers to undergo gender tests

"Footballers in Iran's professional women's league are to undergo mandatory gender tests to establish that they are fully female. The country's football governing body is bringing in the random checks after it was revealed that several leading players - including four in the national women's team - were either men who had not completed sex change operations, or were suffering from sexual development disorders." ([Telegraph UK](#))

Iraq

February 6: Iraq slammed for women prisoners' abuse

"A report issued by Human Rights Watch documents torture, sexual assault and other forms of abuse against female inmates." ([Al-Jazeera](#))

Israel

January 27: Study: Israel should encourage employment of Arab women

“According to a new study, this year the Israeli economy will lose at least 1.6 billion shekels [\$460 million] because it has not invested in past years in supporting [female] employment in the Arab sector. This huge sum relates only to an increase in the participation of Arab women in the workforce, does not include men, and does not calculate taxes and savings in welfare allotments.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

February 4: Orthodox feminist group breaks ranks with Women of the Wall

“The Israeli Orthodox feminists’ organization has joined forces with a group of dissenters within Women of the Wall, the multidominational women’s prayer group, in voicing fierce opposition to a new government plan that would effectively prevent women from praying [without restriction] at the women’s section of the Western Wall.” ([Haaretz](#))

Kuwait

February 1: Kuwait against all forms of discrimination against women - MPs

“Two members of the Kuwaiti National Assembly Dr. Khalil Abdullah Ali and Faisal Mohammad Al-Kandari on Saturday called for helping Arab women to gain their political rights and ending all forms of discrimination against them.” ([KUNA](#))

Lebanon

February 7: Arab women in media, marketing ‘lean in’

“Career-minded women in marketing and communications are finding increasingly welcoming corporate environments in the Middle East.” ([Daily Star Lebanon](#))

Morocco

February 1: Morocco takes a stride forward for mothers and children

“Morocco is one of the 9 countries in WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region to have adopted a national plan to accelerate progress on maternal and child health over the past year... Morocco’s maternal mortality ratio fell by 67% between 1990 and 2010, and the infant mortality rate dropped by 60% between 1990 and 2011. The new plan aims to bring about even faster progress. It sets the country on course to achieve reductions in under-five and maternal mortality of 70% and 82%, respectively, from the 1990 levels by 2015.” ([World Health Organization](#))

February 5: Moroccans call for 'no tolerance' of violence against women

“A campaign of "no tolerance" for violence against women was launched in Morocco Wednesday by rights groups pressing the government to take greater action... These include guaranteeing equal access to employment, criminalizing all forms of violence against women, including marital violence, protecting women in public and creating units to monitor the abuse of women's rights.” ([AFP](#))

February 9: Morocco's inheritance dilemma

“Attempts at reforming the inheritance law in Morocco, which favors males over females, has been met with staunch opposition from Islamic scholars and Moroccan citizens.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

Oman

February 10: 8.3% of Omani households headed by women

“Of the number of women heading their families, 45 percent are widows, 19 percent divorced, 28 percent married and eight percent were single. According to the study, married women head their households due to disability of the husband or their inability to work or because the husband works in another city.” ([Muscat Daily](#))

Palestinian Territories

February 5: In a uniquely confined Palestinian village, a feminist awakening

“Barakat’s Women’s Association has grown since 2010 to include 50 women from Nabi Samwil and the nearby villages. Instructors come in from the West Bank and Jerusalem to teach classes in micro-agriculture and food production. The women recently sold locally produced baked goods to a visiting group of Arab schoolchildren from East Jerusalem.” ([The Times of Israel](#))

Qatar

February 3: Young Arab women leaders’ conference to be held in Qatar

“The Arab International Women’s Forum will hold its ‘Young Arab Women Leaders: The Voice of the Future’ conference in Doha this spring... This will be an opportunity for young women who aspire to be business, community and political leadership to meet prominent woman business leaders from Qatar and the region, alongside representatives from governments, leading business organizations and non-governmental organizations.” ([Gulf Times](#))

Saudi Arabia

January 29: Saudi women defy tradition to enter workplace

“Over the past six years female participation in the workforce has almost doubled from 9 percent to 16 percent, cutting into female unemployment of roughly 30 percent. While the majority of Saudi women are joining the teaching profession, many others are ignoring threats from ultraconservative opposition and replacing men in retail outlets as supermarket cashiers.” ([Financial Times](#))

February 1: Saudi women take the lead in civil service jobs

“The statistics published by the Saudi Ministry of Civil Service revealed a steep increase in the number of women being employed in teaching and non-teaching positions. Female applicants took 62 percent of civil service jobs advertised over the past two months, in comparison to 38 percent of male applicants.” ([Asharq Al-Awsat](#))

February 10: Saudi soccer debate broadens over women's rights and nationalism

“The restrictions on women's sports appear at odds with public opinion. A Saudi sociologist concluded in November on the basis of a survey that the vast majority of Saudis favor granting women the right to engage in sports. The survey conducted by Mariam Dujain Al-Kaabi as part of her master thesis showed that 73.5 percent of the respondents unambiguously endorsed a woman's right to engage in sports while 21.6 percent felt that it should be conditional.” ([Huffington Post](#))

Syria

February 3: Al-Qaeda in Syria forms female brigades

“The Al-Qaeda-linked Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has formed two female battalions in Syria’s northern city of Raqqah, pan-Arab newspaper Asharq al-Awsat reported on Sunday. The battalions were reportedly launched as part of ISIS’ efforts to “expose male activists who disguise in women’s clothing to avoid detention when stopping at the ISIS checkpoints.” ([Saudi Gazette](#))

February 7: Refugee crisis boosts women’s services

“Stories from Syria of sexual harassment at checkpoints, punitive gang rapes during house raids and genital torture of both male and female detainees have been widely reported... In response, international and local organizations have channeled funding, training and material support toward initiatives to treat both the physical and psychological wounds of such abuse.” ([Daily Star Lebanon](#))

Tunisia

January 27: Tunisia approves groundbreaking new constitution

“The new constitution sets out to make the country of 11 million people a democracy, with a civil state whose laws are not based on Islamic law, unlike many other Arab constitutions. An entire chapter of the document, some 28 articles, is dedicated to protecting citizens’ rights, including protection from torture, the right to due process, and freedom of worship. It guarantees equality between men and women before the law and the state commits itself to protecting women’s rights. Amira Yahyaoui, of the monitoring group Bawsala, said “It will have a real impact on the rest of the Arab region, because finally we can say that women’s rights are not a Western concept only, but also exist in Tunisia.” ([France 24](#))

UAE

January 28: Funding a stumbling block for women entrepreneurs in Middle East

“Although women have made great strides toward gender equality, men continue to dominate the region’s economy as entrepreneurs. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which make up 95 percent of the private sector in MENA, are a driving force of the region. However, only 2.5 percent of small businesses in MENA were owned by women. The gender gap is not as wide on a global scale where more than a third (37 percent) of enterprises are women-owned.” ([Zawya](#))

January 29: 900 female athletes to participate in 2nd Arab Women Sports Tournament

“This year’s tournament will bring together 900 female athletes from 14 countries including the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Palestine, Oman, Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq from February 2 - 12, 2014, to compete at various locations throughout Sharjah in a range of both traditional and modern sports.” ([Emirates 24/7](#))

January 30: This Niqab-Wearing Tech Whiz is Smashing the Glass Ceiling in the Middle East

“President Barack Obama recently sent an Emirati woman named Fatima Jasem Al Zaabi an invitation to dinner at the White House in recognition of her work with Microsoft PowerPoint. The 31-year-old innovator has found a way to use PowerPoint to create architectural designs for homes.” ([PolicyMic](#))

February 7: UAE law requires mothers to breastfeed for first two years

“The United Arab Emirates has passed a law requiring mothers to breastfeed their children until they are two years old. The clause was added to a children's rights law, but the social affairs minister, Mariam al Roumi, said it raised the prospect of husbands suing wives who did not breastfeed.” ([The Guardian](#))

February 9: 60-day maternity leave for expats in Sharjah

“Sharjah becomes the first emirate in the UAE to extend the ruling to 60 days for both Emiratis and expatriates. The decision also applies to male employees whose wives deliver babies in and outside the UAE, entitling them to paternity leave for three days with pay. A 2001 law that was revised in 2011 by the Sharjah Executive Council allowed only Emirati women to take 60 days off and an unpaid leave of 100 days.” ([Khaleej Times](#))

February 10: World’s Most Powerful Arab Women

“Reem Al Hashimy, the face of Dubai’s Expo 2020 bid, tops the Gulf Business list of the world's most powerful Arab women.” ([Gulf Business](#))

Yemen

January 28: Yemen human rights minister pushes for child marriage ban

“On the wake of Human Rights Watch annual report, Yemen Human Rights Minister Hooria Mashour decided to become vocal about her intention to sponsor a draft-law, banning child marriage for good and align Yemen with international regulations.” ([Yemen Post](#))

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