

# MENA Women's News Brief

January 20-27, 2014

*The Middle East Program is delighted to announce that it will send out the latest developments on women's issues in the region on a bi-monthly basis. Please find the first edition below.*

## **Bahrain**

### **January 20: Women's rights treaty approved**

“Bahrain's government has approved full rollout of a United Nations (UN) convention that protects women's rights - ignoring opposition from MPs who claimed it could have ‘dangerous repercussions’ for society. The Cabinet approved a proposal to lift reservations that were included when the country acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2002.” ([Gulf Daily News](#))

## **Egypt**

### **January 27: Egypt's Shame: Why Violence Against Women Has Soared After Mubarak**

“The 2011 revolution may have toppled Mubarak, but it did not liberate Egyptian women. In the transition under both military-backed governments and one led by the Muslim Brotherhood, the state has only increased its efforts to control women's sexuality.” ([Foreign Affairs](#))

## **Iran**

### **January 21: Iranian women warned about wearing chador**

“Reformist clergyman and former Iranian Vice President, Mohammad Ali Abtahi, told *Al-Monitor*, ‘From an Islamic standpoint, we as members of the clergy are to preach the right [path]. That's all. We are not to pursue people's behavior, nor should we attempt to correct it through publicly condemning it.’ He told *Al-Monitor*, ‘Chador is an Iranian option of coverage, and choosing to wear it or opting out does not define people's religious beliefs. It's simply like any form of dress. But what makes this a sensitive issue is that since hijab is mandatory in Iran, less coverage is interpreted as resisting the regime. And that's why all hell breaks loose when it comes to women's hijab.’” ([Al-Monitor](#))

## **Iraq**

### **January 21: Iraqi women mostly absent from political scene**

“‘Despite some gains made in recent decades, Iraqi women remain largely absent from the country's political scene...’ MP Aliya Nussayif said, ‘There is a lot of injustice against women in the executive branch. If it were not for the quota, we would not have had this representation on the political scene.’ Nussayif told *Al-Monitor*, ‘In the executive branch, women are looked down at from a tribal and Islamic lens, which deprived them from a large number of their rights.’” ([Al-Monitor](#))

## **Israel**

### **January 24: Israel Must Give Jobs Boost to Arab Women, Haredis, Flug Says**

“‘Israel should offer employers incentives to hire Arab women and ultra-Orthodox Jewish men, two population groups with low labor participation rates,’ [said] Bank of Israel Governor Karnit Flug... About 30 percent of Arab

women are employed, similar to rates in Arab countries in the Middle East, compared with 70 percent for the general female population in Israel.” ([Bloomberg](#))

## Morocco

### **January 21: Arab women encouraged by Arab Spring: Activists**

“Forty activists and women rights experts from Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Yemen attended the training organized by Karama, a regional NGO, in collaboration with the UN Fund for Gender Equality, in order to share experiences and open a dialogue about advancing women's emancipation and rights in their own countries.” ([Al-Ahram](#))

### **January 23: Morocco: Amendment of Rape Provision Is a Step in the Right Direction**

“Today's vote is a welcome step but Morocco still needs a comprehensive strategy to protect women and girls from violence, with input from women's rights groups who have been excluded from the process so far,’ said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa. ‘It took 16-year-old Amina Filali's suicide and nearly two years for the parliament to close the loophole that allowed rapists to avoid accountability. It's time to have laws that protect survivors of sexual abuse.’” ([All Africa](#))

## Saudi Arabia

### **January 20: Women's role not progressing enough, says Saudi Shura member**

“We are moving, but it isn't as fast as it could be,’ said Dr. Thoraya Obaid, a Saudi Shura Council member and a former executive director of the United Nations Population Fund during a panel discussion at the Global Competitiveness Forum. When it comes to opening businesses in the Kingdom, there is a big difference between men and women, Obaid added, stating that ‘there is a difference between law and implementation,’ which ultimately leads to the isolation of women's issues from the society as a whole.” ([Al-Arabiya](#))

### **January 21: Saudi female MP calls for accelerated steps to empower women**

“When it comes to women, the progress needs to be accelerated because there are many projects that the Justice Ministry has introduced to empower women but has been very slow in implementing them,’ Hanan al-Ahmadi, a member of the Saudi Shura Council, told Al Arabiya News Channel.” ([Al-Arabiya](#))

### **January 27: Women account for 38% of all government employees in Saudi Arabia**

“Latifa Al-Shaalan, a Shoura Council member, said Saudi Arabia has the lowest rate of employment of women in the region. ‘Women constitute 49 percent of the total population, and yet they do not represent more than 10 percent of the overall workforce. The Kingdom has the lowest proportion of female employment compared with other countries, such as neighboring Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait.’” ([Arab News](#))

## Syria

### **January 22: Kurdish women fight for equality in Syria**

“While both Islamist rebels and forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad have sidelined women, in this Kurdish area, men are happy to fight alongside them. Kurdish military leaders say about a third of the Kurds' fighting force are women.” ([Reuters](#))

### **January 23: Where are the Syrian women at the Geneva peace talks?**

“Earlier this month the Syrian Women's Forum For Peace held a conference in Damascus of more than 60 women from across Syria, representing all spectrums of society. The women came together, at great danger to themselves, to develop a Syrian Women's Charter for Peace to present at Geneva II. The charter calls for measures to prevent

the supply into Syria of weapons and armed militants, and to stop exporting terrorism to Syria via neighboring countries.” ([The Guardian](#))

Read the official statement from the Syrian Women’s Forum for Peace [here](#).

#### **January 24: Syrian women in Jordan at risk of sexual exploitation at refugee camps**

“Aid workers are warning that young Syrian women in Jordan are increasingly at risk of exploitation, with many struggling to survive in a country where they are not allowed to work. Some have families who are reliant on aid or meagre savings... ‘We have had lots of reports from the media and people on the ground that trafficking is becoming a problem, this typically happens where there is conflict and [there are] vulnerable people,’ [Amira Mohamed] says.” ([The Guardian](#))

#### **January 24: Working at a Women's Clinic in a Syrian Refugee Camp**

“As Syrian peace talks continue, women in refugee camps face a lack of basic resources and the loss of a structured community.” ([The Atlantic](#))

### **Tunisia**

#### **January 27: Tunisia's Ennahda and Ettakattol women MPs celebrate**

“Tunisia's new constitution could usher in momentous change for women, following the adoption of a clause which guarantees gender equality in legislative assemblies and for steps to be taken to protect women against violence, a first in the Arab world.” ([BBC](#))

### **Yemen**

#### **January 23: Yemen Takes a Step Toward Ending Child Marriage**

“After about a year of work on finding a new system of government and to pave the way for general elections in 2014, a national conference of Yemeni political, social and religious groups this week issued its proposals for a new constitution... Under a subheading “Child Marriage,” the proposals for the constitution say the minimum age for either gender to marry is 18, while specifying there will be punishments for anyone transgressing the requirement that girls must be 18.” ([New York Times](#))

#### **January 26: Yemen moves to criminalize child marriage**

“As Yemen prepares to draft its new constitution now that NDC representatives have laid down the ground work, rights activists were pleased to learn that Yemen intends to honor its commitment toward civil liberties by entrenching values such as freedom of thought, expression, gender equality and women’s rights directly into the constitution.” ([Yemen Post](#))

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