

MENA Women News Brief

March 1, 2016-March 15, 2016

In celebration of International Women's Day 2016, the Middle East Program and Women in Public Service Project at the Wilson Center asked a number of women in the MENA Region and the United States for their thoughts about the status of women.

[\(Read here\)](#)

Algeria

March 7: Campaign Involving Men in Women's Promotion in Algeria

“A campaign involving men in the protection and the promotion of woman has been launched the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Algeria, under the theme ‘I am a man, I respect women.’ This campaign was initiated on the occasion of the celebration of the International Day woman, said Monday the UNFPA in a statement.” ([All Africa](#))

March 9: Soumaia Fergani: The only woman in Algerian stadiums

“For seven years, and in the midst of a gruesome civil war, Soumaia Fergani was the only woman in Algerian football stadiums when she was the country's only qualified female match official. She now serves as a deputy in the National People's Assembly, but prior to her political aspirations, football was her true passion.” ([BBC](#))

Egypt

March 7: Is Egypt doing enough to counter widespread sexual harassment?

“Although a number of recent developments offer hope to Egyptian women that efforts to combat sexual harassment are working, change is slow. An Egyptian TV talk show host who slammed a sexual assault survivor, blaming her for provoking the attack by ‘dressing immodestly,’ has been sentenced to one year in prison.” ([Al Monitor](#))

March 8: How Egyptian females celebrated International Women's Day

“On International Women's Day, in which different women celebrate their achievements on personal and professional levels worldwide, Egyptian women are still in the early stages of an uphill battle to guarantee all their basic rights, often being dealt with as second degree citizens.” ([Daily News Egypt](#))

Iran

March 1: How women, the Green Movement, and an app shaped Iran's elections (Op-Ed by Narges Bajoghli)

“Women's organizations began organizing for the elections in November by releasing videos encouraging women to register as candidates and pushing for a 30 percent increase in seats for women, through ‘The Campaign for Women to Win 100 Seats.’ Significantly, these efforts featured activists from across the political spectrum coming together for one goal: to gain seats for women who would fight for pro-equality gender issues.” ([The Washington Post](#))

March 3: Tricked Into Cheating and Sentenced to Death (Op-Ed by Shirin Ebadi)

“In August 2009, I was betrayed by both my husband and my country. A few months earlier I had left Iran — for good, perhaps, though I did not know it then. The government had harassed me for years for my work as a lawyer and a human-rights activist, and the threats against me had increased in the run-up to the presidential election that June.” ([New York Times](#))

March 8: Iranian politician: Parliament is no place for children, donkeys, or women

“One Iranian politician has observed International Women's Day by sharing his opinion that Iran's parliament should remain for men only. The important post of heading the Assembly of Experts is now up for grabs, with the former assembly chair, Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, having failed in his bid to be re-elected to the body Friday, February 26.” ([Al Monitor](#))

March 8: Five Iranian women visionaries you need to know

“In Iran, patriarchal systems in place keep women at a disadvantage. In space, in science labs or on stage — these women are just a few of the bright minds from Iran who are blazing a trail for their compatriots.” ([New York Times](#))

March 15: Iran insurers to compensate women equally in road accidents

“Iran's legal vetting body has approved a bill that will see female victims of road traffic accidents paid the same compensation as men.” ([Reuters](#))

Iraq

March 1: Meet the women who risked everything to open their own restaurant in male-dominated Iraq

“All three women were forced to leave their homes in the early 90s as a result of Saddam Hussein's ruthless persecution of the Kurdish population. Unmarried and largely homebound, Naska Nassredin devised a way to escape her domestic chains by creating a business that would justify her spending whole days outside the house. She decided to open her own restaurant.” ([The Telegraph](#))

March 2: Germany opens its doors to Yazidi women and children enslaved by ISIS

“The shelter in a sleepy village hundreds of miles outside Stuttgart is one of several dozen that has opened across the German region of Baden-Württemberg since spring last year as part of a special-quota project designed to support some of the estimated 2,500 women and children who have escaped after being held hostage by Islamic State.” ([The Guardian](#))

March 12: To Maintain Supply of Sex Slaves, ISIS Pushes Birth Control

“Islamic State leaders have made sexual slavery as they believe it was practiced during the Prophet Muhammad's time integral to the group's operations, preying on the women and girls the group captured from the Yazidi religious minority almost two years ago. To keep the sex trade running, the fighters have aggressively pushed birth control on their victims so they can continue the abuse unabated while the women are passed among them.” ([New York Times](#))

Israel

March 8: Study Shows Arab Women in Israel Live in Fear of the State

“Israelis in general have a low sense of personal security, but Arab women feel even more vulnerable than other population groups, according to a new study that will be presented to the Knesset today. The study examined various aspects of Israelis' sense of personal security, ranging from how safe they feel in public spaces to how they rate their employment, health and economic security.” ([Haaretz](#))

March 8: Ten Ways Israeli and Jewish Women Cracked the Glass Ceiling This Past Year

“International Women’s Day provides an opportunity to review some breakthroughs made by Israeli and Jewish women worldwide this past year. From a record number of female Knesset members, to the first Orthodox female rabbi, here are substantial reasons to celebrate International Women's Day.” ([Haaretz](#))

March 13: New combat positions for women in the IDF, same old obstacles (Op-Ed by Judah Ari Gross)

“Women have gone into Gaza and West Bank cities. Female pilots have flown over enemy countries. If a war should again break out in Lebanon, female Israeli soldiers would go there too. But there will probably never be a female commander of the storied Paratroopers Brigade or the roughneck Golani Brigade.” ([Times of Israel](#))

March 14: Is Israeli media changing its tone on sexual harassment?

“Contrary to past cases of famous Israeli figures suspected of sexual harassment, in the case of Brig. Gen. Ofek Buchris, both the media and social networks are in no hurry to declare that Buchris is guilty.” ([Al Monitor](#))

Jordan

March 8: Jordan's women fight for political representation

“A campaign to increase the women's quota in Jordanian parliament was dealt a blow when Jordan's Lower House voted down a proposal to increase the number of female representatives to 23, putting an end to weeks of campaigning. Campaigners and female MPs expressed disappointment at the outcome.” ([Al Jazeera](#))

Kuwait

March 4: Kuwaiti women outnumber men in workforce

“According to 2014 figures, Kuwaiti men made up 28.3 percent of the total male labour market and women 39 percent of the women’s labour market.” ([Gulf News](#))

Lebanon

March 4: Syrian refugee women take on life in a man's world

“Lebanon, with a population of 4.4 million, is currently acting as host to more than one million Syrian refugees—three-quarters of whom are women and children. As a consequence, many women are now supporting their families alone for the first time in their lives.” ([Al Jazeera](#))

March 10: How a new website is helping Lebanese women avoid sexual harassment

“Cat-calling, men masturbating in public, and being inappropriately touched and insulted are part of daily life for some women in Lebanon. Such is their experience based on testimonies published on HarasserTracker.org, a website launched at the end of February by three young Lebanese entrepreneurs.” ([Al Monitor](#))

Morocco

March 7: Survey: 78 percent of Moroccan Women Frustrated with Work at Workplace

“Seventy-eight percent of working Moroccan women expressed ‘frustration with tiring working conditions,’ according to study conducted by the Forum Azzahrae for the Moroccan Woman. In addition, over 50 percent of Moroccan women spend time after work completing household chores and ensuring their children are completing their schoolwork on time.” ([Morocco World News](#))

Palestinian Territories

March 8: The Speed Sisters: Palestine's first female racing team

“In the face of these obstacles, racing gives the Speed Sisters an escape from the restrictions of the occupation: ‘Being behind the wheel of a car that you can control is a great sense of freedom. Then on top of that being able to drive fast, to be able to race and the adrenalin, it’s a huge release for them,’ says Fares.” ([Middle East Monitor](#))

March 8: For Palestinian women, abortion can mean lies, jail, or worse

“For women seeking abortions in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, where Palestinian law strictly limits the procedure, the choice is stark: have the baby or terminate the pregnancy by using ruses, risky back-alley methods or even turning to neighboring Israel, where the laws are far more permissive.” ([Reuters](#))

March 13: Palestinian teacher wins \$1 million Global Teacher Prize

“A Palestinian primary school teacher who grew up in a refugee camp and educates her students about non-violence won a \$1 million prize for teaching excellence on Sunday, March 13 beating out 8,000 other applicants from around the world. Hanan al-Hroub was awarded the second annual Global Teacher Prize during a ceremony in the city of Dubai, United Arab Emirates.” ([Washington Post](#))

Qatar

March 10: Growing number of Qatar women show startup intentions

“In Qatar, 32 percent of the female population has start-up intentions compared to 40 percent of the men, according to AT Kearney. Despite recent progress, rates of female entrepreneurship in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) have remained low compared to the rest of the world.” ([Gulf Times](#))

March 13: Four Qataris make it to top 100 most powerful Arab women index

“Health minister Dr. Hanan Al Kuwari and three other Qatari women are among the world’s 100 most powerful Arab women of 2016, according to a newly released index.” ([Doha News](#))

Saudi Arabia

March 8: Challenges facing Saudi women’s first year at municipal council

“Saudi women were waiting for December 2015 to enter for the first time the Municipal Council. Some 20 women are now participating in Municipal Council deliberations at different regions in Saudi Arabia while the total number of Municipal Council members exceeds 3,150. Though the women seats are yet few, their participation has come after a long journey, activists said.” ([Al Arabiya](#))

March 8: International Women’s Day: Are Saudi women really that oppressed?

“Would you want to live as a woman in Saudi Arabia? Based on what you hear, probably not. Life for women in the Arab kingdom is often painted as one of repression, after all they are forbidden from driving and are restricted by male guardianship laws which deprive them of their independence.” ([BBC](#))

March 12: One step forward, one step back

“In the new, more conservative environment, perhaps the best hope for women is that the country might rediscover its own traditions. Most striking of all is the Prophet Muhammad’s own requirement that women and men perform the pilgrimage to Mecca together; and that when women go round the Kaaba, Islam’s holiest place, they show their face. Saudi Arabia’s new rulers might take note.” ([The Economist](#))

Syria

March 4: Syria's Trailblazing Kurdish women (video)

“There's an extraordinary social change happening in Syria's Rojava region. Since the Syrian conflict began in 2011, the predominantly Kurdish area has revolutionized society, with the primary beneficiaries being women. There's an all-female militia, female judges alongside male, and co-leadership at all levels of public administration. How did this come about?” ([BBC](#))

March 7: Syrian women bear the burden of displacing conflict

“As the unrest in Syria enters its fifth year, the conflict ravaging the country has dealt a heavy blow to the daily lives of its citizens. Women and children are among those most vulnerable to the conflict, finding relief only in the safe havens in other countries far from the homes where they have lost their families, friends and everything they once owned.” ([Daily Sabah](#))

March 8: Syria's peace talks need more women at the table (Op-Ed by Margot Wallstrom)

“The human suffering in Syria is beyond comprehension. The only long term solution to the Syrian conflict is a political one. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the peace talks resume and continue towards tangible results.” ([The Guardian](#))

March 8: Former extremist says family and social trouble can lead young women to join ISIS

“Yasmin Mulbocus knows how difficult it is to convince young Muslim women in England that buying a plane ticket to Syria and joining ISIS is not the answer to their problems, and is not an honorable way to live their lives. She knows because 20 years ago, Mulbocus was part of an extremist group that propagated hate while making her feel included for the first time.” ([New York Times](#))

March 14: Women secretly film inside ISIS stronghold

“Two Syrian women took a hidden camera through the northern Syrian city of Raqqa to document their life under ISIS rule, knowing they faced execution should they be discovered, according to CNN Swedish affiliate Expressen TV, which commissioned the video.” ([CNN](#))

Tunisia

March 8: Has life got worse for Tunisia's women?

“Tunisia's revolution is seen by some as the only success story of the Arab Spring. But the BBC's Sally Nabil reports from the capital, Tunis, that five years on, life could be getting worse for one group - women.” ([BBC](#))

Turkey

March 1: Syrian woman gathers refugees in Turkey into women's choir to grieve, find strength

“Raja Banout was told by those around her that her idea was crazy: creating a choir of Syrian refugee women to sing traditional songs each week as their country was devastated by civil war. They said, ‘You are crazy, we are at war.’ ‘And I said that is exactly why we should sing,’ Banout said.” ([New York Times](#))

March 7: Turkish police fire rubber bullets to break up Women's Day rally

“Turkish police on Sunday, March 6 briefly detained at least one woman and fired rubber bullets to disperse a crowd of hundreds of people trying to mark International Women's Day in central Istanbul. The group, which gathered before official Women's Day commemorations on March 8, had ignored a ban on the march by the Istanbul governor who scrapped this year's rally, citing security concerns.” ([Al Arabiya](#))

March 8: Recep Tayyip Erdogan: ‘A woman is above all else a mother’

“Turkey’s president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has said he believes ‘a woman is above all else a mother’ in a speech marking International Women’s Day. Erdoğan has been criticized in the past for urging Turkish women to have at least three children and for railing against efforts to promote birth control as ‘treason’. Critics have accused his government of trying to impose strict Islamic values on Turkey and curtailing women’s civil liberties.” ([The Guardian](#))

March 9: Why some Turkish women are boycotting women-only taxis

“A number of women have welcomed Turkey’s first women-only cab, but many activists reject the new service as further gender segregation in public life.” ([Al Monitor](#))

March 14: How this Kurdish agency breaks news, taboos

“The journalists of Turkey’s only all-female media outlet, the Kurdish agency JINHA, challenge male dominance in both their society and their profession, braving the harsh realities of a war-torn region. The agenda is hectic with urban clashes between the security forces and Kurdish militants, military operations and round-the-clock curfews resulting in dire humanitarian fallout.” ([Al Monitor](#))

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