

# MENA Women News Brief

February 1 - February 14, 2017

## **Egypt**

### **February 2: Female entrepreneurs seek solutions to Egypt's traffic woes**

"Egypt's female entrepreneurs are tackling their country's growing transportation issues with a number of out-of-the-box ideas. 'Many female entrepreneurs have found that they can come up with creative solutions, just like their male partners in the transportation industry, to help reduce daily sufferings on the road,' said Rania Ayman, founder of Cairo-based nonprofit Entreprenelle, which supports women-run start-ups." ([Al-Monitor](#))

### **February 6: Mishwar seeks expansion in Greater Cairo, recruiting 10,000 women**

"Mishwar Company launched its first training courses, to teach women driving cars, last week, within an initiative launched by the company last month under the name 'Women Can Drive.' It aims to provide driving lessons for women and give them the chance to join the company's Eve Department, which offers transportation services by female drivers. The company said in a statement that it targets training and recruitment of 10,000 women across the country this year." ([Daily News Egypt](#))

## **Iran**

### **February 2: Iran to blind acid-attack woman in retribution punishment: Tasnim**

"Iran's supreme court has ruled that a woman must be blinded in one eye as punishment for an acid attack that left her victim sightless, using the principle of 'eye for an eye' of Islamic Sharia law, the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported on Thursday, February 2. Under Iran's Sharia law, imposed since the 1979 Islamic revolution, qesas (retribution) is permitted in cases where bodily injuries are inflicted." ([Lebanon Daily Star](#))

### **February 3: Behnaz Shafiei: Iran's trailblazing female biker makes history with women's race**

"When Behnaz Shafiei crosses the finish line on Friday, February 3, at the end of a dusty, rock-strewn race track in Karaj, near Tehran, it will mark the end of both a simple motorbike race and a three-year campaign for women's rights in Iran. Whether she wins the race or not, it's a victory. The 27-year-old has got a concession from Iran's sports ministry to stage the country's first ever all-female motorbike race, despite women being barred from motorbike riding by modesty laws." ([BBC](#))

## **Iraq**

### **February 2: Sexual harassment common even for Iraqi women professionals**

"Iraqi women are dealing with worsening harassment in the workplace and sexual abuse in general, according to statements made by Iraqi members of parliament and media reports. On Jan. 15, 2017, parliament member Aaliyah Nasif revealed that she has been receiving complaints of sexual harassment of female employees in a number of ministries, while on Jan. 17, Education Minister Mohammad Iqbal dismissed the director-general of the ministry for soliciting sexual favors in exchange for a promotion." ([Al-Monitor](#))

### **February 10: 'Girl on the bike' in Iraq pedals for women's rights**

"Marina Jaber has become better known as 'the girl on the bike' after inspiring other Iraqi women to exercise their rights, one turn of the pedal at a time. The young artist cuts an unusual figure as she rides her red bicycle through Baghdad, her hair swaying in the wind. What she started as an art project soon

became a social media meme and then a movement. Women now gather regularly to cycle in Baghdad and break new ground in Iraq's conservative society." ([The National](#))

### **February 13: Security arrests 2 Islamic State Yezidi women slavers in Mosul**

"An Iraqi army force arrested on Monday, February 13, two Islamic State members who used to trade women slaves from the Yezidi minority, a local source said. 'Intelligence teams from the army's 16th division arrested Heggie Farhan and Mahmoud al-Kassab,' the source told Alghad Press, adding that the pair belonged to the Tel Kaif and Qawsiyat regions in northeastern Mosul. The latter had been wounded at one battle with security forces and lost one of his legs. 'They had used to sell Yezidi women during the group's control over Nineveh Plains region,' said the source." ([Iraqi News](#))

## **Israel**

### **February 6: IDF targets women for tech as Israel feels worker pinch**

"Rotem Falach and Lior Dariel, both 24, sit together behind a desk in their small office at an army base in Ramat Gan. Their hair is tied in tight ponytails and their green army uniforms are perfectly ironed. The two Israel Defense Forces lieutenants have another three to four months of duty after having served some six years in the IDF's elite tech C4I communications corps, where today they are commanders of the training course for new recruits." ([Times of Israel](#))

### **February 10: Women's pre-army program reflects the religious debate in Israel**

"It's hard to believe that 27 female recent high school graduates [...] are the cause of an intense debate within Israel's national-religious population. The young women are students at Mechinat Lapidot, one of only two pre-army preparatory programs in Israel for girls who come from religiously observant homes. [...] Some Orthodox families prefer that their daughters pursue the traditional national service option after high school, rather than sign up for army service. [...] But a growing number of Orthodox girls are opting for the opportunity to take on more challenging and rigorous roles in the Israel Defense Forces, where they might serve in an intelligence unit, as soldier-teachers, in a combat unit, or in cybersecurity." ([The Jewish Standard](#))

### **February 10: Jerusalem rabbinical court says spousal abuse not grounds for divorce**

"In Israeli woman who was denied a divorce by a rabbinic court on the grounds of documented domestic violence has appealed to the state's attorney general. The woman's lawyers made the unusual appeal Thursday, February 9, following the Jerusalem Rabbinic Court's rejection of her divorce motion. Her husband had been convicted and imprisoned for 75 days for assaulting his wife last year." ([Times of Israel](#))

## **Lebanon**

### **February 3: Lebanese women demand 30 percent quota in parliament seats**

"Lebanese women rallied on Wednesday, February 1, to call for an increased female representation in any parliamentary electoral law approved by the different political parties. While women constitute 51 percent of the Lebanese population and 54 percent of university graduates, they are merely represented in Parliament, as they currently occupy 3.1 percent of parliamentary seats. Lebanese President Michel Aoun and Prime Minister Saad Hariri have stressed on several occasions their commitment to allocate a certain quota to women to support their active participation in political life" ([Al Bawaba](#))

## **Morocco**

### **February 6: Casablanca: Women Stage Sit-In Denouncing Burqa Ban**

"A group of Moroccan women who wear the burqa gathered Sunday, February 5, at the United Nations Square in Casablanca in order to denounce the Ministry of Interior's decision in January prohibit the sale and manufacture of the burqa. Organized by the 'Joint Committee for the Defense of Islamist Detainees,' the protestors chanted slogans against the Ministry's decision, calling a 'disregard for Moroccans and contrary to the law and the constitution.'" ([Morocco World News](#))

## **Oman**

### **February 6: First woman elected to Oman Shura Council passes away**

"Raheela Al Riyami, former Shura Council and State Council member passed away on Sunday, February 5. She was in her late 60s. Al Riyami was the first Omani woman to be elected in the Shura Council in 2000, along with Lujaina Mohsin Darwish. She represented Bausher province of Muscat governorate. It is unclear what the cause of death was." ([Gulf News](#))

### **February 8: First Omani woman to head Police Rescue Department**

"Hanan bint Khalfan Al Salimi, the first Omani woman to have been appointed Director of the Police Rescue Department, says it shows the trust that Omani women command, and how they support the country's march towards progress. [...] 'I feel proud of the significance that this position holds, and thank those who have given me with this responsibility,' Hanan added. 'I can work side by side with my male colleagues. Omani women today are ambitious in their work. They occupy the highest positions in the state and support our dear nation in advancing every day,' she stressed." ([Times of Oman](#))

## **Palestinian Territories**

### **February 5: Fashion designer revives Palestinian embroidery through new collection**

"Palestinian designer Natalie Tahhan is on a mission to revive her country's rich identity and bring it back into fashion - and she is doing it one embroidery motif at a time. The Doha-based designer recently launched her first solo collection 'Prints of Palestine,' highlighting the unique embroidery designs from each city of her country." ([Al Arabiya](#))

### **February 10: Palestinian singles find love through matchmaking service**

"At Al-Amal Marriage Center, which opened in December 2016 in Ramallah, Amal Kokash Abu Hijleh spends eight hours a day in her office taking requests from men and women searching for a spouse. Al-Amal Center is a marriage matchmaking service. Abu Hijleh, 45, matches couples by relying on her extensive social contacts, as she is the former mayor of Deir Istiya in Salfit governorate and a social worker. [...] Abu Hijleh emphasized that her main aim is helping women find a spouse, saying, 'In our society men could be 40 years old before deciding to marry, and when they do decide they choose girls who are much younger. On the other hand, the chances of a 30-year-old woman finding a husband are slim.'" ([Al-Monitor](#))

## **Saudi Arabia**

### **February 5: Saudi Arabia celebrates its first ever Women's Day in Riyadh**

"Saudi Arabia has celebrated its own Women's Day, a first for the ultra-conservative Islamic kingdom. A three-day gathering was held at the King Fahd Cultural Centre in the capital of Riyadh. It featured speakers who argued for women's rights to drive and called for an end to the country's male guardianship system. Female members of the Saudi royal family also attended the event, with Princess Al-Jawhara bint Fahd Al-Saud hosting a discussion on women's roles in education." ([Independent](#))

### **February 7: Saudi women use social media to expose harassment**

"A campaign using the hashtag #Break\_Your\_Silence\_Speak\_Up has been started to encourage Saudi women to expose examples of harassment, rape, physical abuse and suppression against them. While abuse against women is naturally shocking, the women have explained, the fact that it continues to happen in a conservative Muslim society is even more shocking." ([Middle East Monitor](#))

### **February 12: Saudi Arabia to start granting female gym licenses this month**

"Licenses will be granted for women's gyms by the end of February, Princess Reema bint Bandar, vice president for women's affairs at the General Authority of Sports, told local daily Okaz. A target is in place to open gyms in every district and neighborhood, it was reported. Three ministries are set to take part in this process, including the labor, rural affairs and commerce ministries. Licenses will not be issued for gyms that offer competitive activities, such as football, volleyball, basketball and tennis. The focus will instead be on techniques that contribute to weight loss and fitness, such as swimming, running and bodybuilding." ([Arab News](#))

## **Syria**

### **February 2: Syrian army creates new women's unit to fight ISIS**

"The Syrian army has created a new battalion solely consisting of female recruits who have signed up for the fight against ISIS, local media reports. Al-Masdar News, which is sympathetic to the Syrian regime, posted a video of several dozen women in combat fatigues and headscarves taking part in target practice and singing patriotic songs on Wednesday, February 1. The battalion, named Khansawat Souria, is made up of around 150 women from towns in Qamishli in the north of the country. It is led by Ba'ath party member Jazya Tu'mah." ([Independent](#))

### **February 4: A Displaced Syrian Woman Realizes a Dream by Aiding Refugees**

"Ms. Mazloum, a 40-year-old Syrian mother of five daughters, wrestled with societal expectations her entire life, and after she divorced her husband she was left on her own to raise their girls in a deeply patriarchal environment. A few years into Syria's civil war, she escaped with her girls to Lebanon, settling in a new land and finding an opportunity to become a leader in a way she had always envisioned for herself since she was a child." ([New York Times](#))

### **February 10: Syrian Arab women battle ISIS, social stigma**

"They are fighting the world's most feared jihadists, but hundreds of Arab female fighters battling the Islamic State group in Syria are also confronting the disapproval of their relatives and society. 'I braved my tribal clan, my father, my mother. Now I'm braving the enemy,' says 21-year-old Batul, who is part of an Arab-Kurdish alliance battling to capture ISIS's Syrian stronghold of Raqqa. She is one of more than 1,000 Arab women who have joined Kurdish male and female fighters in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) alliance, according to a spokeswoman." ([Al-Monitor](#))

## **Tunisia**

### **February 3: Tunisian Minister warns of alarming rates of violence against women, children**

"Tunisian Minister of Women, Family and Children Naziha Laabidi warned yesterday that violence against women and children in Tunisia has reached very alarming levels. Laabidi made her remarks during a hearing before the rapporteur of the Committee of Rights, Freedoms and External Relations in the Tunisian parliament. According to the minister, cases of spousal violence reached 38,000 cases between the period between 2011 and 2015, saying the figure is 'very alarming.'" ([Middle East Monitor](#))

## Turkey

### **February 10: Women to see positive discrimination through Turkey's 'employment movement' campaign: Minister**

"Labor and Social Security Minister Mehmet Müezzinoğlu has vowed that 1.5 million jobs will be created in line with the Turkish government's recently launched 'employment mobilization' campaign, saying in particular that women would benefit from positive discrimination in these new jobs. The cabinet will also seek to help disabled people and ex-convicts join the workforce in the campaign, which was recently heralded in a speech by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in which he said all employers should create 'at least one new job.'" ([Hurriyet Daily News](#))

### **February 12: Syrian refugee teaches Arabic to the women of Turkey's Kilis**

"A Syrian refugee is working to bridge the language barrier between Syrians and the residents of Kilis by giving Arabic classes. Gufren Duden, who came to Turkey after losing her parents in Syria, quickly learned the Turkish language and is now teaching Arabic to the women of Kilis. Duden first lost her father in Syria's civil war and then lived with her mother in Aleppo. She came to Kilis five months ago, after her mother also perished in the war. The 37 year old used to teach illiterate women in a training center in Aleppo, and found an opportunity to continue her favorite profession through the social programs instituted by the Kilis Municipality." ([Daily Sabah](#))

## Regional

### **February 6: Arab League chief pushes for women's rights amid regional unrest**

"It is imperative to protect the rights of women as the Arab region plunges further into turmoil, the Arab League's Secretary-General Ahmad Abul-Gheit said on Monday, February 6. Speaking during the opening of the 36<sup>th</sup> session of the Arab Women's Committee, Abul-Gheit notes that escalating violence against women is a primary concern, especially at this crucial juncture. Moreover, he drew a correlation between security and women's rights, issues set to take precedence over the rest of the meeting's agenda." ([Kuwait News Agency](#))

### **February 8: Women Are Key to Counterterrorism**

"President Donald Trump's decision to suspend refugee admissions to the United States and block the citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries has been criticized as a violation of longstanding U.S. law and an abdication of fundamental American values. Although administration officials argue that the policy will help further American security interests, many experts believe it will do the opposite – handing extremists a powerful recruitment tool and alienating allies in the fight against terrorism. [...] Instead, if Trump wants to shake things up in his effort to safeguard American citizens against terrorism, he should rely upon the inclusion of a group that is often overlooked but is of substantial strategic value: women." ([U.S. News](#))

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