

MENA Women News Brief

October 24, 2016-November 9, 2016

Egypt

November 5: Egypt's All-Woman Roller Derby Team Is Skating Past Stereotypes

“In Egypt, Saturday nights are for staying in — the workweek starts on Sunday. But for the members of CaiRollers, Egypt's first all-female roller derby team, it's for skating. The team's 20 members meet for three hours every week, at the Cairo International Stadium's outdoor handball courts, to practice. It's an aggressive game, requiring full body contact like hip and shoulder checks. But that's why players like Lina El-Gohary, 27, love it.” ([NPR](#))

Iraq

October 26: The Iraqi women who escaped ISIS but lost everything

“Zainab's eyes are hazel, and a sliver of olive skin peeks from the stretchy turquoise scarf wrapped tightly around her face. Over her shoulder is an insulated bag with the word ‘Lunch’ on it that she is using as a purse. Her nails are lacquered red, the tips just starting to chip. And on her feet are leopard-print flip-flops. I imagine Zainab before ISIS as a confident teenager, full of verve. But now, in her eyes, I see grief and a girl beaten down before even entering adulthood.” ([CNN](#))

November 4: Kurdish Women Battle ISIS With Songs — and Machine Guns

“When Islamic State insurgents fired mortar bombs at Iranian Kurdish women fighters holding a desert position in northern Iraq, the women first hit back by singing through loudspeakers. Then the women opened fire with machine guns. ‘We wanted to make them angry. To tell Daesh that we are not afraid,’ said Mani Nasrallahpour, 21, one of about 200 female peshmerga fighters who left behind their lives in Iran to take on the hard-line Sunni militants.” ([Voice of America](#))

Israel

October 28: How Arab women are reshaping Israel's film industry

“The rift between the Jewish and Arab communities in Israel has deepened recently, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warning his constituents on the last day of the elections in March 2015 that Arabs were ‘voting in droves,’ thus making more than a million Arabs feel like second-class citizens. But despite this deepening rift, three films have taken the Israeli film world by storm, providing a fascinating glimpse into Arab society in the Jewish state.” ([Al Monitor](#))

Jordan

October 25: With Every Turn of a Wrench, Jordanian Woman Breaks Barriers

“It is graduation day, and Maryam Mutlaq is celebrating her transformation from stay-at-home mom to licensed plumber. The training took 18 months. Now, Mutlaq and her 29 course mates—all veiled, most middle-aged—take turns presenting a business plan at the March ceremony. Mutlaq, 41, speaks with a clear, strong voice and stands out for her detailed vision. She will open a storefront plumbing business, she tells the other women. From there she plans to sell pipes and other spare parts, and book house calls.” ([Associated Press](#))

November 2: Jordan's penal code amendments urged to stiffen penalties in crimes against women

“A human rights organization on Tuesday, November 1 called on authorities to amend the Penal Code and stiffen punishments imposed on those who commit crimes against women, especially after the

increase in such crimes since the beginning of this year. The Sisterhood Is Global Institute – Jordan (SIGI) said that since the beginning of 2016, 26 crimes involving women were committed, marking a 51 per cent increase compared to 2015.” ([Zawya](#))

Palestinian Territories

November 1: Palestinian lawyer fights for women, one divorce at a time

“Dressed in the headscarf and long robe of a devout Muslim, Reema Shamasneh fights for Arab women in the most intimate arena of their lives: Marriage and divorce. One case and one client at a time, from a West Bank courtroom, she challenges the gender roles at the foundation of Arab families. Women across the Arab world have gained ground in education and health, but inequality remains entrenched in most family courts where Islamic law, or Sharia, is applied. Men can divorce on a whim, while women must prove cause. And polygamy is legal only for men.” ([The Hindu](#))

Qatar

November 3: Qatar University postpones ‘Women in Islam’ talk over controversy

“Qatar’s national university has said it will reschedule a lecture that was supposed to be held today after its keynote speaker came under fire for her views. Saudi scholar Dr. Hatoon Al Fassi, a Qatar University faculty member, was slated to talk about women in Islam at the school this afternoon. But this week, several students and community members launched a Twitter campaign demanding she be sacked for challenging Qatari and Islamic values.” ([Doha News](#))

Saudi Arabia

October 26: Saudi women snub questions from The New York Times

“‘We would like to communicate with Saudi women,’ began the esteemed *New York Times* newspaper on its Twitter Account this week. ‘Tell us about your lives, ambitions and opinions in the Saudi community.’ To most readers the tweet might have seemed relatively well-meaning, if rather presumptuous. Tied to a new documentary produced by the journalist Mona el Naggat, it accompanied a survey full of Arabic questions about Saudi women’s lives and aspirations, and was the newspaper’s first tweet in Arabic. In Saudi, however, the attempt to reach out didn’t go down well.” ([Al Bawaba](#))

November 2: Saudi Advisory Council Rejects Study of Women Driving

“Saudi Arabia’s Shura Council, which advises the cabinet, has turned down a proposal to study the issue of women’s driving, a Shura member told AFP. The kingdom has some of the world’s tightest restrictions on women, and is the only country where they are not allowed to drive. At a meeting this week, a male member of the appointed council suggested the study, said another member who declined to be named.” ([Al Manar](#))

November 7: A Liberal Mother of Six Jailed For Challenging Saudi Taboos

“When Souad al-Shammary posted a series of tweets about the thick beards worn by Saudi clerics, she never imagined she would land in jail. She put up images of several men with beards: An Orthodox Jew, a hipster, a communist, an Ottoman Caliph, a Sikh, and a Muslim. She wrote that having a beard was not what made a man holy or a Muslim. And she pointed out that one of Islam’s staunchest critics during the time of Prophet Muhammad had an even longer beard than him.” ([Associated Press](#))

November 8: Saudi women can now work in pharmacies

“Women of Saudi Arabia can now work in pharmacies and herbal medicine stores, but not alongside men. The ministry of health will start giving licenses to women wishing to work in pharmacies, herbal medicine stores and optical shops inside shopping centers, Saudi Gazette quoted a source saying.

However, they shall work in shops with female staff only and will not be allowed to work with men. ‘The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labor and Social Development will be closely monitoring the work environment and its safety,’ said the source.” ([Khaleej Times](#))

Syria

October 31: Syrian women under siege face new threat: their periods

“Like many women, Huda dreads her menstrual period every month. But it isn't simply inconvenient or painful: She lives under siege near Syria's Damascus, without sanitary pads or even clean water. ‘When feminine products started to become rare in 2012, I had a really hard time,’ says the 23-year-old from Saqba, a rebel-held town in the battered Eastern Ghouta area, which has been besieged since 2013. Speaking to AFP using a pseudonym, Huda says the very few female hygiene products available in Saqba are too expensive for her and her husband.” ([The Independent](#))

Turkey

November 1: Turkish authorities shut down first Kurdish all-female news agency

“Turkish authorities have shut down the world’s first international feminist news agency amid a wide ranging government crackdown on opposition media. JINHA, a Kurdish all-female news agency based in the south-eastern city of Diyarbakır, was closed down and their main office forcibly sealed on October 29, along with a series of other major and local media outlets.” ([The Independent](#))

November 2: Erdoğan: Women should be present in every sector of society

“Speaking at the sixth Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) women's conference in Istanbul, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said the Muslim world needed strong families and nations and that cannot be secured by isolating women. At the conference with the theme, ‘Status of Women in the OIC Member States in Light of Current Challenges,’ President Erdoğan declared: ‘Strength cannot be acquired through isolating women. The mentality of ‘Let's keep women at home and away from everything’ is not the route to strength.’” ([Daily Sabah](#))

UAE

October 26: UAE committed to counter violations against women

“Jamal Jama Al Musharakh, Deputy Permanent Representative of the UAE to the UN, has highlighted the UAE's commitment to building a strong framework for action to counter violations of women's rights and sexual violence against women. Speaking at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, Al Musharakh said that UN-led investigations have uncovered the use of sexual and gender-based crimes committed by Daesh and Boko Haram as deliberate tactics.” ([Khaleej Times](#))

October 29: Dubai counsellors work to help abused or trafficked women find jobs

“Internships, employment, regular income and an affordable home are the goals of women who have gone to Dubai Foundation for Women and Children for therapy. The foundation encourages the women to test the job market. Counsellors emphasize that that is a transitional phase, with support to allow the women the means to study, work or return to their home country. ‘We encourage women during rehabilitation to find opportunities to improve their life,’ said Afra Al Basti.” ([The National](#))

November 7: Meet Dubai’s ‘single’ moms here to support their families

“When we talk about women empowerment, we often picture educated and learned independent women. But here in Dubai, women from across the world are creating examples of women empowerment, despite all odds. They may not hold any college or university degree. They may not have been to elite

schools. Some of them may not have even completed their high school. Yet, they single-handedly support their families - fighting life alone each day.” ([Khaleej Times](#))

General

October 26: Sex, honor, shame and blackmail in an online world

“A BBC investigation has found that thousands of young women in conservative societies across North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia are being shamed or blackmailed with private and sometimes sexually explicit images. Daniel Silas Adamson looks at how smartphones and social media are colliding head-on with traditional notions of honor and shame. In 2009 an 18-year-old Egyptian girl, Ghadeer Ahmed, sent a video clip to her boyfriend's phone. The clip showed Ghadeer dancing at the house of a female friend.” ([BBC](#))

October 31: I’m An Arab Trans Woman, Struggling To Find Myself In Language (Op-Ed by Dalia T.)

“Five years ago, when I got the government scholarship that would allow me to go to Canada, I started to dream of new words. French and English words, spoken and written, fresh words, dusty words; words to define myself and my body, to cradle the girl that I wanted to be. I had plenty of words already; Arabic is a dense language with words that are sometimes too poetic to be patriarchal. But when it comes to sex, sexuality, and gender, there is a disheartening lack of words in the standard use of Arabic. I didn’t have words specifically for who I was and who I was becoming.” ([Huffington Post](#))

November 5: Let’s close the Mideast gender gap in less than 129 years (Op-Ed by Yara al-Wazir)


“For as long as I have lived, I have hoped that my children will grow up to experience true gender equality. According to the World Economic Forum, this is unlikely as it will take an estimated 178 years to close the gender gap around the world. Particularly focusing on the Middle East, if the Middle East continues to progress at the rate it has done so for the past ten years, the region will achieve gender equality in 129 years. I don’t think this is good enough.” ([Al Arabiya](#))

November 7: Feminism After the Arab Spring

“Women have served as indispensable agents of change during and after the Arab Spring and have made significant gains but have a long road ahead. It was not uncommon to see news of the Arab Spring accompanied by photos of women on the frontline. Women participated, organized and even led many of the uprisings throughout the region. In some countries, it was women who became the face of the revolution, including Tawakkol Karman in Yemen and Zainab al-Khawaja in Bahrain, to name a few.” ([Fair Observer](#))

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