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The MENA Gender and Development eBrief receives material from various sources for its publication. Should you wish to refer to these sources/ sites directly, the list includes publications from: AVIVA, www.aviva.org, AWID: www.awid.org, Democracy Digest: www.freedomhouse.org, Development Gateway: www.developmentgateway.org, Dignity: www.dignity.org, e-Civicus: www.civicus.org, Eldis: www.eldis.org, ESCWA: www.escwa.org.lb, GDB: www.developmentex.com, Global Knowledge Partnership: www.globalknowledge.org, IGTN: www.IGTN.org, ILO: www.ilo.org One World: www.oneworld.net, Siyanda: www.siyanda.org, The Daily Star: www.dailystar.com.lb, The Drum Beat: www.comminit.com, The Soul Beat:

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NEWS & ARTICLES

GENDER ACTIVISM

Highest number of women running for parliament in Lebanese history

The Lebanese Parliament has reached its highest quota in number of women running for elections. But this may not be a day to mark in history, as the MPs are meeting up on May 31 and deciding on whether or not to postpone the elections, which many politicians have voiced in favor of. "We are going to take advantage of this. We are not supporting the extension but if they postpone we will have more time to work and plan for a better election,"



Joelle Abou Farhat Rizkallah, co-founder of Women in Front. 45 women handed in their candidacy for the elections, which compares to 12 women in 2009 years election. This is an increase. Looking at it from a statistical point of view, the female candidates estimate to 7.6 percent of the total of candidacies, which were 706 men and women all together. About 90 percent of the female politicians are part of Women for Parliament, which is a collaboration of NGOs for women empowerment and civil society. Their aim is to bring Lebanon towards gender equality and putting more women in power and parliament. "We are happy to have this number of candidates. It's just what we hoped for," Abou Farhat Rizkallah said. Although this is the highest number in Lebanese history of female candidates running for parliament, it might not yet be the final total. An extension of up to two years of the parliaments mandate has been proposed, which has been strongly condemned by the civil society movement. On Friday, May 31, the MPs will meet at 3 P.M. to decide on whether or not to extend the mandate. The female candidates, Women in Parliament, Women in Front, along with civil society movement will hold a manifestation outside of the parliament to protest against the postponing of elections. Laury Haytayan an independent candidate, will be attending the manifestation. She is very disappointed with how the current MPs have handled their mandate period and will protest against granting them another day past their elected time. "I will be there because we should react to what is happening. They haven't done their job with finding a modern electoral law. They failed on every aspect; socially, economically, politically, and now they are giving themselves the right to extend. It's a bullet in democracy for Lebanon," Haytayan said. To read more about this issue follow the link <http://www.iloubnan.info/politics/78044/Highest-number-of-women-running-for-parliament-in-Lebanese-history#sthash.jjRLg4GS.dpuf>

My Nationality is a Right for Me and My Family Campaign addresses the report to the Human Rights Council on discrimination against women in relation to nationality rights

"My Nationality is a Right for me and my Family Campaign" has reviewed with much interest and concern the below statement given by Lebanon's permanent representative at the

charge d'affaires in the permanent mission at the United Nations in Geneva, Mr. Bachir Azzam, to the UN Human Rights Council session held in Geneva on Tuesday 4 June 2013.

Whilst the Nationality Campaign welcomes the fact that the issue of women's rights to Nationality was emphasized in Mr. Azzam's statement, we wish to rectify the facts which as stated by his excellency, are both incomplete and misleading. Indeed, a first ever Ministerial Commission was set up in March 2012.

The said Commission was presided by Minister Samir Mokbel with the membership of the Ministers of Interior, Foreign Affairs, Labor, Information, Justice and Social Affairs. The Commission failed to meet until July 2012. It then met with the Campaign in December 2012 and committed to review the possible scenarios to reform the law in a way that would be just and fair. The Commission then issued a series of unprecedented

recommendations in which it asserted that "equality, although enshrined in the Constitution, is not a binding principle should it cause a risk to higher national interests. The Commission also indicated that Lebanon is not bound to implement international human rights treaties and conventions for the same reason. Furthermore, the National Commission for Lebanese Women, whose law petition was not endorsed or addressed by the Commission, challenged all the arguments presented by the said Commission. As such, we find that the principles that the Ministerial Commission used are in clear violation of Human and Women's Rights. The Commission has set the clock backward in ensuring women's basic citizenship rights. The Campaign calls on the Lebanese State to honor its commitments to the international Human Rights Charter and to the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and proceed without further delay in reforming the currently discriminatory nationality law of 1925 and harmonize it with the international provisions for women's rights. Only a reform that upholds equal citizenship and rights can address this endemic injustice and violation of women's inherent rights as full-fledged citizens of Lebanon. We call on the Human Rights Commission to pressure Lebanon to honor women's citizenship and rights and cease the poor maneuvers that it has been using thus far to maintain women in unequal and subordinate positions.



Beirut, 5 /6/2013

My Nationality is a Right for Me and My Family Campaign

To read more about this statement follow the link

<http://www.lorientlejour.com/article/817937/la-campagne-sur-la-nationalite-denonce-le-discours-dun-representant-libanais-a-lonu.html#.UbGfPqd4L10.twitter> or

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Lebanese-Womens-Right-to-Nationality-and-Full-Citizenship/144824882142>

Lebanese Women Race Towards Empowerment

Thousands of women raced on the streets of Beirut in a competition entitled “You are really strong”, just a few hours after two rockets hit a Beirut suburb - a reminder of the volatile political situation in the country. But the women put politics aside and many of them ran the 10 kilometer stretch on Beirut’s waterfront to raise awareness for a number of causes that matter to Lebanese women from healthcare issues to demands for new legislation to give women more rights. The race was organized by the Beirut Marathon Organization which holds the annual marathon in Beirut as well as other community-based challenges and races across the country for a number of charitable causes.



“Its importance is shedding light on women, that they should have a leading role in sports. In the 5 kilometer race and the mother’s race, there are more than 4,000 participants who have come to run today to raise their voice and say women make up half of society,” said May El Khatib, the president of the Beirut Marathon organization.

The runners said the race was an occasion for the women to prove their strengths to not only themselves but the rest of society. “It is time for her to rise against her times and her society and everyone that abuses her. She is strong and makes up half of the society and she can achieve the same things that men achieve, so it is time, overcome your difficulties, you are strong. Like we proved ourselves today and reached the finish line, for sure she can overcome her obstacles and reach her goals,” said runner Rania Nasra. The race was divided into three categories: the 10 km run, a 5 km fun run and 1 km run for mothers and their babies. One woman said the race proved that women are strong, despite the challenges that they may face. To continue reading news related to the Marathon follow the link:<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/life-style/healthy-living/2013/05/26/Lebanese-women-race-towards-empowerment.html>

"Woman in Red" Sprayed with Teargas - Symbol of Protests in Turkey

In her red cotton summer dress, necklace and white bag slung over her shoulder she might have been floating across the lawn at a garden party; but before her crouches a masked policeman firing teargas spray that sends her long hair billowing upwards. Endlessly shared on social media and replicated as a cartoon on posters and stickers, the image of the "woman in red" has become the leitmotif for female protesters during days of violent anti-government demonstrations in Istanbul. "That photo encapsulates the essence of this protest," said math student Esra at Besiktas, near the Bosphorus strait and one of the centres of this week's protests. "The violence of the police against peaceful protesters, people just trying to protect themselves and what they value." A fourth day of violence erupts in cities across Turkey where protesters claim Prime Minister Erdogan's government has become increasingly authoritarian. NBCNews.com's Dara Brown reports. In one graphic copy plastered on walls the woman appears much bigger than the policeman. "The more you spray the bigger we get" reads the slogan next to it. The United States and the European Union as well as human rights groups have expressed concern about the heavy-handed action of Turkish police against protesters. Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan branded the protesters on Monday extremists "living arm in arm with terrorism," a description that seems to sit ill with the image of the woman in red. There were others dressed in more combative

gear and sporting face masks as they threw stones, but the large number of very young women in Besiktas and on Taksim Square where the protests began on Friday evening is notable. With swimming goggles and flimsy surgical masks against the teargas, light tasseled scarves hanging around their necks, Esra, Hasine and Secil stood apprehensively in the Besiktas district on Monday evening, joined by ever growing numbers of youngsters as dusk fell and the mood grew more sombre. They belong, as perhaps does the woman in red, to the ranks of young, articulate women who believe they have something to lose in Erdogan's Turkey. They feel threatened by his promotion of the Islamic headscarf, symbol of fem ale piety. Many of the women point to new abortion laws as a sign that Erdogan, who has advised Turkish women to each have three children, wants to roll back women's rights and push them into traditional, pious roles. "I respect women who wear the headscarf, that is their right, but I also want my rights to be protected," said Esra. "I'm not a leftist or an anti-capitalist. I want to be a business woman and live in a free Turkey." Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, founder of the secular republic formed in 1923 from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, encouraged women to wear Western clothes rather than headscarves and promoted the image of the professional woman. Ironically, Erdogan is seen these days as, for better or worse, the most dominant Turkish leader since Ataturk. Erdogan was first swept to power in 2002 and remains unrivalled in popularity, drawing on strong support in the conservative Anatolian heartland.



The weekend demonstrations in dozens of cities suggest however his popularity may be dwindling, at least among middle classes who swung behind him in the early years of political and economic reform that cut back the power of the army and introduced some rights amendments. "Erdogan says 50 percent of the people voted for him. I'm here to show I belong to the other 50 percent, the half of the population whose feelings he showed no respect for, the ones he is trying to crush," said chemistry student Hasine. "I want to have a future here in Turkey, a career, a freedom to live my life. To read more about that issue follow the link <http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/news/2013/06/04/18741084-woman-in-red-sprayed-with-teargas-becomes-symbol-of-turkey-protests>

Engaging Religious Leaders to End Child Marriage

In many places where child marriage is most prevalent, religion and tradition exerts a powerful influence over communities. Working with religious and traditional leaders is a key part of Plan's work to help protect girls and ensure they access their rights.

In this interview with the Sultan of Dosso in Niger - which features in Plan's new child marriage report - he explains why he supports Plan's work to end child marriage:

"Our role as traditional [customary] leaders is managing the customs of the communities. Management really implies development, and development means training, education, health. For me, the issue of girls' education is paramount.

"I'm 88 years old, and ever since my medical training, I have understood that marrying a young girl early at the age of 11, 12 - something that our customs allow - that a girl that age is not physically mature. "She may unfortunately get pregnant, and this often ends up with surgical intervention, or with fistula. That's frequent. So it's normal that I should attempt

to explain this very serious phenomenon to my population, which leaves little girls physically challenged for life. "It's not only a loss for us in terms of development, but it's also a huge loss for the girl. These girls are physically and psychologically scarred for life. "As soon as one learns, in villages or in schools, of a case of child marriage, we are notified. I have my village chiefs, my customary chiefs who try to stop it. If they can't solve the problem, they come to me. That's when I summon the parents and all concerned to dissuade them. Our work is mainly dissuasion, raising awareness and explanation. "I've always said that Plan Niger does remarkable work in the Dosso region. We, like you, work to train (educate) villages. You are also trying to educate people, like us, so we complete each other. You're giving me support that I am taking with both hands."



To Read Plan's global child marriage report follow the link:

<http://plan-international.org/where-we-work/africa/niger/what-we-do/our-successes/engaging-religious-leaders-to-end-child-marriage>

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Child Marriages Rise Among Syrian Refugee Girls

Syrian refugee women gather in the living room of a house on the outskirts of the Lebanese town of Jdeideh in the Bekaa Valley, close to the Syrian border. Most of the women are teenagers; the only two adults look to be in their 40s. They're all dressed neatly, and everybody seems healthy and well fed. According to them, though, that wasn't always the case "When we left Syria, we slept in the street, all of us...we had nothing to eat," says Maya, one of the younger girls. "We ate hunger. At 14, Maya is the most striking of the group, with unusual light blue eyes in a round face. She says she's just been engaged to a wealthy Lebanese man from the town, but she's dreading the union because her future husband is 45 years old.

"I'm marrying him so things will be better," Maya says. "I don't want to get married; I don't want to have children. I'm only doing this for security. Isn't it shameful that I'm 14 years old and I have to marry a 45-year-old man?"

"I don't love him," she says, starting to cry. "I can't even look him in the face." The U.N. estimates that just under 500,000 registered refugees have crossed the border into Lebanon since the Syrian conflict started in March 2011. Individuals and families fleeing Syria are now scattered across the country, but the largest number of refugees is concentrated in the Bekaa Valley. Those who can afford rent live in rooms or houses, while the most impoverished occupy ad hoc settlements that have sprung up in and around northern towns such as Arsal. According to UNHCR, 78 percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are women and children. This gender disparity is at least partially due to the high number of male casualties resulting from the conflict. In addition, many men have elected to continue fighting in Syria instead of fleeing to Lebanon and other neighboring countries. These circumstances ensure that the majority of Syrian refugees are also the most vulnerable. Reports of sexual harassment and assault of women and girls, sometimes by other Syrians, but mostly at the hands of local men, have dogged settlements in Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt for some time. Jihane Larous, UNICEF's child protection and gender-based violence specialist, says the threat of sexual violence, combined with extreme poverty, has caused an upswing in the number of child marriages among Syrian refugees. "With the emergency

surrounding the conflict in Syria, the trend of early marriage has increased," says Larous. "At the same time, the reasons for early marriage have changed. In addition to the economic motivation behind this practice...there is also the issue of protection...to protect the honor of the girl and her family. Because of the prevalence of sexual violence, whether in Syria or here in Lebanon, marrying your daughter puts her under the protection of a man, so she'll be less at risk of being assaulted." In a much smaller, shabbier room at a settlement near a mosque in Aرسال, another 12 women sit on mattresses lining the floor. Their clothes are torn and ragged, their faces tired. A few hold babies in their laps. The mother of three of the girls, a middle-aged woman named Rihab, holds court at the center of the room. "The girls can't leave and go anywhere by themselves," she says. "The men harass them and grope them. Honestly, I have two girls who aren't married yet. If men came along and wanted to marry them, I would agree right away, so I can save them...from the danger and harassment." A 20-year-old woman named Reem holds a squirming three-year-old girl in her lap as she talks. "A girl we know was kidnapped by four men," she says. "They kept her for 10 days, then threw her in the street. Imagine how traumatized she must be. 10 days, and God forbid, four men." One of

Rihab's daughters, a pretty 17-year-old named Sarab, chimes in. "Now her father wants to marry her to anyone, even a beggar," she says, shaking her head. The mayor of Aرسال, Ali al-Hojeiri, denies these allegations of sexual misconduct by local men. "That doesn't exist...not a single Syrian woman has filed a complaint about this," he says. "We look after those girls as if they were our own daughters." In a separate conversation, the deputy mayor,



Ahmad Fliti, admits to a growing trend of men from Aرسال marrying Syrian girls, but also claims to have no knowledge of any sexual harassment taking place. The women, however, tell a very different story. Reem describes an incident in which she says a man from Aرسال tried to entice and then force her into a shop, beating her when she resisted. "I told him... 'Don't think all Syrian girls here have no self-respect,'" she says. "'Do you think I'm so low that I would respond to you? You're the ones who have no self-respect, that you would harass us like this. You should be helping us, feeding us, treating us like family. We're in a very bad situation, and you're trying to take advantage of us.' So he hit me...my face was all swollen. I started to cry and ran away." Ghida Anani, director of Abaad, a Lebanese NGO that does work related to gender-based violence in the Syrian camps, says much of the evidence they've collected in assessments and focus groups supports these allegations. "During these sessions, we became more informed about the magnitude of the problem," says Anani. "Women and adolescents talked excessively about incidents of sexual violence they encountered both in Syria and Lebanon. There's also the issue of using women for sexual purposes; in other words, forced prostitution." The women at both the mosque settlement and Maya's house say they've encountered many examples of this kind of sexual exploitation. Maya's aunt, a formidable woman named Mona, says that prostitution, whether forced or consensual, happens often among the refugees. "There are families who sell their daughters to survive," she says. "But the men here also take the girls they want, with or without money." Maya's mother jumps in. "I'm marrying my daughters so they can be safe and we can be secure," she says. "Before, we were all living in one room. We felt like

beggars. I had a son, but he was martyred in Syria. My husband is fighting there. Who is supposed to take care of us?" Kecia Ali, a professor of religion at Boston University who specializes in issues of gender-based violence, such as early marriage, says the tradition of child marriage occurs in developing countries across the globe. She explains that during times of conflict, this practice tends to evolve in a multitude of ways. "Often, we think of child marriage as a practice of hardened patriarchs who give absolutely no thought to their daughters' wellbeing," says Ali. "But in a situation where sexual violence is feared, marrying a girl off is perceived in some instances as a way to ensure that she's able to make a good match. So it's done out of concern for her welfare." Some of the girls at the mosque settlement express despair at their lack of recourse in instances of gender-based violence. Sarab uses the example of an influential man in Arsal who is notorious for harassing and assaulting Syrian girls. "There's nothing anyone can do to stop this man," she says. To continue reading that story and for more information follow the link

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/05/child-marriages-rise-among-syrian-refugee-girls/276287/>

Ex-minister: Iranian women 'complimentary' but not equal to men

Iran's former Minister for Women's Affairs Mahnaz Afkhami says Iranian women are complimentary to men but not equal entities. Iranian women are barred from major areas of activity that require working alongside men because they are not considered equal, Iran's former Minister for Women's Affairs told Al Arabiya English on Sunday.

"In general, the whole philosophy is that women are complimentary to men but not equal entities," said Mahnaz Afkhami, who is also president of



the Women's Learning Partnership. On the sidelines of the Women Deliver 2013 conference in the Malaysian capital, she explained that a change of mindset in Iran is required. "When you have that sort of philosophy, and you are proud of it and constantly advertising it, of course women are unable to show their real potential and help develop the country," Afkhami said. When asked about the recent claim by an Iranian cleric that women cannot run for the presidency because it is against [Iranian law](#), Afkhami said the issue in the Islamic republic is much bigger than just presidential elections. Women "are barred from a lot of areas of activity. They are barred from majors in university that will inevitably require them to work in integrated surroundings. They are barred from being judges. They are barred from a large number of professions that necessitates them working with men," Afkhami said. Delegates and speakers at the conference disseminated their message of a globalized strategy to empower women. However, Afkhami said that while there are universal rights that human beings aspire to, "you cannot take the context of one environment and impose it on another." To read more about that issue follow the link

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/2013/05/27/Ex-minister-Iranian-women-complimentary-but-not-equal-to-men.html>

Women are NOT “Housewives”... It’s time to put an END to Sexist Ads in Lebanon

Advertisers are aware of abuse of women in ads and there are always urges that drive them to stereotype women in ads. Lebanon celebrated international women’s day for the achievements of women in the political, social and economic fields and we saw a lot of related conferences, special broadcasts on TV/radio and even tweets from men and women expressing their gratitude for Lebanese women; however, after the “annual” tribute, we still see media showcasing stereotypical ads against women. Maria Bou Zeid, an assistant professor of media studies at Notre Dame University-Louaize (NDU) said: “The problem is not how [media] portray women; the problem is how women perceive their images... How can we make a social change? First, we shouldn’t start the change with the advertising sector; we need to start *somewhere else*. There are two



ways in sociology to make changes, either by education or imposing through laws and that’s how we can have the social change at some point. If both education and law are combined together, we will have a much better result”. Advertisers who are mostly men are targeting both genders on a special occasion for the purpose of visiting a certain store and increasing the sales. According to Melhem Rechdan, an advertising professional, “Big electronic stores mainly focus on portraying women as housewives in their ads”. During mother’s day, electronic brands usually promote products such as kitchen appliances, vacuum cleaners, jewelry but they barely advertise video games, laptops, tablets, etc. “A person’s gift purchasing could have the limit of \$200, thus, it is actually more price-related. The retailers are benefiting from the opportunity of people entering their shops for whatever item they are going to buy during that exact period”. Nevertheless, Rechdan believes that it is the work of advertising agency to come up with a creative concept. He gives the example of exotica campaign of exotica during mother’s day 2013. He described it as very classy and away from stereotyping. “Stereotyping is considered a shortcut by using terms like “all women are housewives”, “all blondes are...”, it facilitates communication yet in the process it’s not accurate” stated Joseph Ajami, a media expert and an associate professor at NDU. He also explained that women believe these stereotyped ads at some point because it makes lives easier and gives them less time to think. It is mainly related to social roles of women and its historical tie to social norms ever since media and society have been setting social roles for the people. Even the word *housewife* is changed and is now well-known as *homemaker*. “There’s a tradition of fixed stereotypes and there is lack of desire to change, which leads to perpetuation of the idea that women belong to a certain category or belong to a certain social role... Ads usually show that women are incapable, dysfunctional and she can’t handle two or three things at the same time.” Ajami added that even a woman who works and does multi-tasking is still and all the time identified as a housewife. She always belongs to the kitchen, preparing food, cleaning and she cannot have fun. She cannot smoke a cigarette without her fear of a man - referring to U.S. Virginia’s Cigarette with the slogan: “You have come a long way, baby”. When Nadine Rohemed, a PR expert and a working mother of two, sees such ads, she feels really offended because they show that women are only good for cleaning, cooking and doing house chores. “Why can’t ads portray the successful working women in Lebanon?” she said. As a PR person, her evaluations concern the fact that seeing these ads shows how far from reality the advertisers are. Even though

clients are the decision-makers because they are the ones who are spending the huge dollars, says Rechdan, yet advertisers a.k.a. consultants can always impact the decision-making process by providing them with rationale and input. Maria Bou Zeid has already begun the practice of building conscious generation of advertisers by teaching students at NDU that they need to be dream sellers and not only sellers. Educating future leaders can be of great value yet remains the laws to be also implemented in order to notice a change in perspectives. Ajami proposes effective lobbying and women activism in an effort to raise their voice and make changes in the Lebanese perspectives. Rita Chemaly, a researcher and a women's rights activist, mentioned that there is a media monitoring website called "Kherberr", which exposes objectification of women and their use as objects in order to promote brands. She listed some of the brands who adopted such stereotypical methods like Mazda, El-Rancho, Babybotte, Tefal, Radio Liban and currently Beirut Marathon Association's Women's 10K Challenge race, which will occur on May 26th. Chemaly said: "I am angry and truly disappointed by the movie created by Beirut Marathon Association for the women race... those who talked at the beginning are sexist and what they said is discriminating against women. I refuse totally to be a part of such an initiative!" She also added, "People should understand that verbal abuse is refused, that stereotyping women as incompetent is refused. Stereotyping women as unable to drive is not funny [but] discriminating. We want people to respect women and the causes the women movement in Lebanon is supporting such as the nationality cause, [Lebanese Women's Right to Nationality and Full Citizenship](#), the criminalization of violence cause ([KAFA](#)), the partnership as equal cause ([Sharika wa Laken](#)), the respect for our bodies, and our brains cause ([Nasawiya](#)), the political participation of women cause ([Women in Front](#))". To read the entire story follow the link <http://jasmineboyajian.wordpress.com/2013/05/22/women-are-not-housewives-its-time-to-put-an-end-to-sexist-ads/>

Girl Dies During FGM - UN Call for Egypt to Enforce FGM Ban

A 13-year-old Egyptian girl has died undergoing circumcision at a village near Cairo, Egyptian media reported on the weekend.

"We left our daughter with the doctor and the nurse. Fifteen minutes later, the nurse took my daughter out of the operation room to a nearby room, along with three other girls whom the doctor was circumcising," said Mohammed Ibrahim, a farmer, according to reports in Al Arabiya Egyptian daily.

"I waited half an hour, hoping that my daughter would wake up, but, unfortunately, unlike the rest of the girls, she did not," he said.

The police ordered an autopsy of the girl, whose name was Suhair al-Bata'a, and summoned the doctor to find the cause of the young girl's death.

A health inspector report said the cause of the death was due to "a sharp drop in blood pressure resulting from shock trauma," the family's lawyer, Abdel Salam, said.

Female genital mutilation, or FGM, is an ancient custom in Egypt, and its history pre-dates both Islam and Christianity. The practice remains widespread, and Egyptian activists say it touches the lives of as much as 90 percent of female population.

Egypt criminalized all forms of FGM in 2008 and rights monitors say the number of girls undergoing the operation has dropped by about one third.



Egypt's National Council for Women condemned the recent death as a criminal act that reflects "extreme savagery," calling on the government to investigate the issue and punish the culprits. UNICEF Egypt has also condemned the incident, saying female circumcision has neither medical nor religious justification. To read more about the issue follow the link <http://www.trust.org/item/20130611122841-m1ncx/>

Bangladesh Matrilineal Marriage - 'My mother and I are married to the same man'

When her widowed mother remarried, Parvin Rema, then 13, was part of the deal - one of several such arrangements in Bangladesh.

As a child in rural Bangladesh, Orola Dalbot, 30, enjoyed growing up around her stepfather, Noten. Her father died when she was small, and her mother remarried soon after. Noten was handsome and energetic, with curly dark hair and a broad smile. "I thought my mother was lucky," Orola says when we meet in the dusty, sun-baked courtyard of her family home in the central forest region of Modhupur. "I hoped I'd find a husband like him one day." When she reached puberty, however, Orola learned the truth she least expected: she was already Noten's wife. Her wedding had taken place when she was three years old in a joint ceremony with her mother. Following tradition in the matrilineal Mandi tribe, an ethnic group of about two million people spread across hill regions of Bangladesh and India, mother and daughter had married the same man. "I wanted to escape when I found out," says Orola. "I was shaking with disbelief."



Disbelief was more or less my reaction a few days earlier when, by chance, I'd first heard about this marriage custom. I was visiting the remote Modhupur region to report a story about Mandi women fighting deforestation. My travelling companion was an eminent Bangladeshi environmentalist called Philip Gain, who had been studying the area for more than 20 years. As we drove through the khaki- coloured hills, we talked generally about how Mandi women were the property-owning heads of their households. Gain, 50, a professorial man in a suit jacket and tie who runs the Dhaka-based activist organisation Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), told me how they shared power with men and had far more independence than women in the majority Bengali population. To read the entire story follow the link

http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2013/jun/02/matrilineal-marriage-in-bangladesh?CMP=tw_t_gu

GENDER & HUMAN RIGHTS

Women's rights violations not just developing nation issue

Over 30 years, we have built up a strong reputation that allows us access to high-level policymakers - the people who can actually make change happen for the victims. So, we use our research, the voices and faces of the victims, to pressure governments to act to stop abuse. On June 16, 2013, CNN premiered "Girl Rising," which documents extraordinary girls and how education can change the world. But what are some of the biggest challenges facing women and girls across the globe today? Liesl Gertholtz, director of the Women's

Rights Division at Human Rights Watch, answers readers' questions about the challenges women face in the Middle East, Asia - and here in the United States.

Can you explain a little about how your organization works?

First, I want to thank those who sent in such great questions. Our primary methodology is documenting human rights violations through the voices of victims - so our researchers talk to people directly affected by abuse, violence and discrimination to document first-hand what has happened to them and the impact it has on their lives. We also speak to witnesses of abuses and, where possible, the alleged perpetrators. Over 30 years, we have built up a strong reputation that allows us access to high-level policymakers - the people who can actually make change happen for the victims. So, we use our research, the voices and faces of the victims, to pressure governments to act to stop abuse.

The culture of blaming the victim in rape cases is still common in India. What can the country do to tackle the problem?

This is a global problem, and one of the biggest barriers that rape survivors, be they women and girls or men and boys, face if they report the assault. Human Rights Watch has documented in many countries the way the criminal justice system, including police officers, medico-legal examiners, prosecutors and judges do not believe victims, refuse to investigate their complaints, and deny them access to justice.

Most recently, we have documented how the police in India failed child survivors of rape by helping alleged rapists evade justice; how displaced women in Colombia who had been raped were mistreated by medical practitioners and how police officers in Washington, DC discouraged victims of rape and sexual assault from reporting the crimes and treated them callously and disrespectfully. To counter these problems, we have recommended, among many other things, specialist training for all sexual assault investigators, measures to protect the confidentiality of victims, access to immediate medical and psycho-social care in the aftermath of rape and sexual assault, and effective accountability mechanisms for victims when the criminal justice system mistreats them. We have also documented how victims experience social stigma and may be ostracized, subject to more violence and abandoned by partners, families and communities when they report rape. In this regard, we have recommended public awareness campaigns that address violence against women, the introduction of human rights programs into school curricula, and training programs for community activists, traditional and religious leaders and other local leaders, journalists and legislators about the reality of how rape happens. What has been the focus of Human Rights Watch's work in the Arab world? Human Rights Watch has worked on women's rights in the Arab world for almost two decades! Our work has tried to address the many forms of discrimination Arab women experience, including the impact of the male guardianship system on women's freedom and autonomy in Saudi Arabia; female genital mutilation in Iraq, unequal divorce laws in Egypt and "honor" crimes in Jordan. More recently, we have focused a lot of our attention on the "transitional" countries of the Arab Spring (Libya, Tunisia, Yemen and Egypt) to advocate for women's political participation and the expansion of their human rights. One of the most heartening things I've observed in these countries is the emergence of a women's movement - it's still fragile in places and it needs the support of the global human rights community, but it's definitely there and is already playing an important role in advocating for women's rights. We have also invested a lot of time trying to document the impact of the terrible conflict on Syrian women, specifically deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians. Challenges facing women's rights aren't confined to developing countries - in the United States, women's rights are also being



challenged. Do you have any specific concerns about the U.S. or indeed other developed countries in particular?

It's completely true that women face human rights violations in the developed world, so I'm very glad that someone made that point. Many women in the U.S. face significant challenges to realizing their rights when they seek access to reproductive health care and access to justice for sexual and other forms of gender based violence. In the United States, we've focused our most recent research on rights abuses against immigrant women, including those in detention. We've documented health-related abuses against women in immigration detention and their vulnerability to sexual assault, as well as sexual violence and harassment of immigrant farm workers and the abuse of domestic workers with special visas in the United States. The work on immigration detention has been very successful, with Immigration and Customs Enforcement accepting and later carrying out many of the recommendations in our reports *Detained and Dismissed: Women's Struggle to Obtain in United States Immigration Detention* and *Detained and At Risk: Sexual Abuse and Harassment in United States Immigration Detention*. We've also focused on sexual violence more broadly and we have worked extensively to document the failure of several U.S. states to test rape kits (which potentially contain DNA and other physical evidence obtained from the bodies of sexual assault victims). Our reports on the backlogs in testing in Los Angeles and Illinois have led to significant changes to practice and policy. Although we haven't done any research on access to abortion, we follow the debates and the many attempts to limit women's rights to make choices about their bodies and their health very closely, and when possible we comment on the human rights dimension of the issue. To read more about this issue follow the link

http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/16/women-s-rights-violations-not-just-developing-nation-issue?origin=from_home

Topless activists in Madrid protest Tunisian arrests

Three women staged a topless protest Wednesday outside the Tunisian embassy in Madrid calling on Tunis to free three fellow activists detained for a bare-breasted anti-Islamist demonstration in the north African nation. The members of radical feminist group Femen removed their shirts to show their breasts and messages daubed on their bodies calling for the release of the trio who are behind bars in Tunisia. "Femen is here today protesting because in Tunisia they have jailed three of our activists who are being judged today just for defending themselves and going to protest for the rights of women in Tunisia," said one of the Madrid protesters, Lara Alcazar.



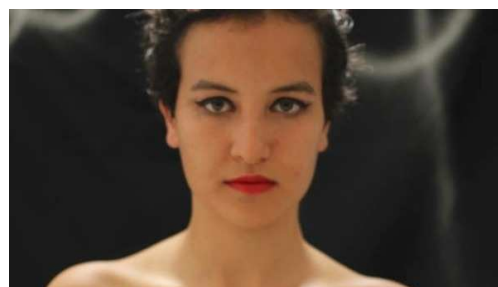
The three protesters held aloft placards reading: "To Fight Is a Right", "Free Femen" and "Imprisoned for Being Feminists". Police did not intervene in the protest, which lasted about 10 minutes and attracted a few onlookers including some peering from the windows of the Tunisian embassy. Pauline Hillier and Marguerite Stern of France and German Josephine Markmann were arrested on May 29 after baring their breasts outside the main courthouse in Tunis in support of Amina Sboui, a Tunisian activist with the same "sextremist" group who had been arrested 10 days earlier. They risk six months in prison and have been denied bail. Their trial in Tunis was to resume Wednesday after being adjourned last week. Read more:

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Jun-12/220148-topless-activists-in-madrid-protest-tunisian-arrests.ashx#ixzz2WYWvR87C>

Amina Tyler, Tunisia's 'topless jihad' Activist, Caught and Under Arrest

After months of reportedly going into hiding, the outspoken Tunisian feminist who sparked a trend of "topless jihad" has been found and arrested by Tunisian authorities earlier this week and may be charged for conducting "provocative acts." To read the entire story follow the link

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/05/21/Amina-Tyler-Tunisia-s-topless-jihad-activist-under-arrest.html>



RESOURCES & CALLS

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Forum on Mediterranean Women's Rights After the Arab Uprisings

Women's rights in the south of the Mediterranean have been on the rise with ups and downs. These rights triggered debates and dialogue between women from the two shores of the Mediterranean. Currently, there seems to be a backlash on these rights after the Arab uprisings. In reflecting on the fate of these rights more than two years after the uprisings, many paradoxes come to mind.

On the one hand, we witness a spectacular presence of women of all ages, ideologies, ethnicities and social statuses during the political mobilization phases of the uprisings (as has been well documented by the media), and yet, on the other hand, in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, etc. the new governments, elected by the people, have a very weak, if not zero, representation of women. Further, on the one hand, the political Islamization of the MENA region is a fact, but yet (and here is the paradox), what most women's rights advocates (scholars and activists) scored through decades was also "Islamic" gains (women's rights advocates in the region fought to improve, not replace, Sharia laws and they have targeted patriarchy not Islam). More than that, many Islamic feminists (scholars and activists) worked together and Islam has never been a problem so far as women's rights advocates in the region are concerned.

These paradoxes call for serious debate and action. The goal of the forum is to discuss the relevant issues and the ensuing new challenges for feminist academics, activists and politicians. The forum is organized around nine major axes:

1. Equality of sexes in the new constitutions
2. Feminist discourses in the region (secular/liberal and Islamic feminisms)
3. Feminine and feminist activisms
4. Women's political participation in the eve of the Arab uprisings
5. Women and economic empowerment
6. Women and cultural Rights
7. Rural Women
8. Women's rights and public/individual freedoms, masculinities
9. Women and transnational networking

The languages of the forum will be : Arabic, French and English
Centre ISIS pour Femmes et Développement

Date: June 21, 22 and 23, 2013

At: the Palais des Congrès, Fez, Morocco.

To have more information about the Forum, follow the link

http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/06_13/06_03/060313_forum.htm

“Toward the mainstreaming of women in labor laws and social protection in Lebanon” National Seminar

CRTD.A a local NGO is Lebanon is organizing a national seminar e ntitled “Toward the mainstreaming of women in labor laws and social protection” with the participation of the former

Minister of
Labor, Dr.
Charbel
Nahhas, the
President of
the Union
Coordination



Committee Mr. Hanna Gharib and the representative of the National Commission for Lebanese Women.

The event will be held on Wednesday June 26th at the YMCA premises in Ain Mreisseh. For more information and to register follow the link <http://crtda.org.lb/node/14580>

BOOKS & REPORTS

Gender Discrimination & Statelessness - Nationality Laws

The Women's Refugee Commission and the Statelessness Program at the University of Tilburg (Netherlands) are launching a report, Our Motherland, Our Country: Gender Discrimination and Statelessness in the Middle East and North Africa. The report calls for an end to gender discrimination in nationality laws. Such gender

discrimination arises when women cannot acquire, change, retain or pass on their nationality to their children and/or their spouses on an equal basis as men. Twenty-nine countries around the world, 11 of them in



the Middle East and North Africa, still have discriminatory nationality laws that make it impossible for women to transfer their nationality to their children, or to their non-national spouses. These laws render people stateless—and severely threaten

their access to healthcare, education, jobs and even marriage. To access the direct Link to Full 27-Page Report: [“Our Motherland, Our Country: Gender Discrimination and Statelessness in the Middle East and North Africa”](#).

Study on Sexual Harassment in Egypt, Post Revolution Increase

Sexual violence against women in Egypt has increased in the post-revolutionary Islamist rule, according to official reports and rights activists. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality said in a report published on May 23 that 99.3 percent of Egyptian women have experienced some form of sexual violence.

Nearly 50 percent of women reported more harassment after the revolution; 44 percent said the level of harassment remained the same before and after the revolution. Meanwhile, more than 58 percent of men surveyed said harassment increased after the revolution. Egypt's general directorate of moral police at the ministry of interior reported that 9,468 cases of harassment, 329 sexual assaults and 112 cases of rape took place in 2012. Activists say the figures released



by the government are smaller than the actual ones because many women do not report cases of harassment against them to the police in fear of shame. The U.N. study found that only 19 percent of women actually report sexual violence against them to the police. It said 32.2 percent keep quiet and move away from the scene, while 26.9 choose to insult or hit back the assailant. “What is different now [post-revolution], and why this has been brought to public and international attention, is that we’re witnessing a number of very violent assaults and rape,” Diana Eltahawy, a researcher at Amnesty International Egypt, told Al Arabiya English. Manal Abdul Aziz Ali, a Cairo-based journalist said, “Today, neither a foreigner nor an Egyptian can enjoy a sense of safety... because of the noticeable rise in the rate of crime and harassment against women.” The reported rise of sexual violence against women is often attributed to security deterioration and the rise of radical Islamists who seek to frighten women away from public places where anti-Islamist protests take place. Salafist preacher Ahmad Mahmoud Abdullah said earlier this year that women protesting in Tahrir Square are “no red line” because they “have no shame and want to be raped,” a statement which was perceived as a sanctioning of violence against women. Egyptian women now “have to think twice” before attending demonstrations, Abdul Aziz Ali said, “not because [women] fear tear gas or even bullets, but because of the harassment being practiced by some thugs and parties to discourage revolutionaries from participating in such events.” Various groups have been formed to defend and decry sexual violence against women in Egypt/ Operation Anti Sexual Harassment and Tahrir Bodyguard bring together volunteers to stop attacks in Tahrir Square, where the police are largely absent. On Jan. 25 2013, as thousands of Egyptians marked the second anniversary of their uprising, at least 19 women were sexually assaulted, Operation Anti Sexual Harassment reported. “These attacks aim to exclude women from public life and punish them for participating in political activism and demonstrations. They are also an attempt to ruin the image of Tahrir Square and demonstrators in general,” the group said, according to AFP. “This phenomenon requires urgent attention and treatment, and is linked to the broader social problem of endemic and daily sexual harassment and assault of women.” Despite civil-society groups banding together to ensure that women are protected, there is a general lack of legal and medical support available to victims, Dalia Abd el-Hameed, gender and women’s rights officer at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, told Al Arabiya English. “Medically, there are no protocols to deal with sexual violence. Rape survivors aren’t being provided with emergency contraception. There’s no protocol on conducting testing for sexually

transmitted infections,” she added. “Psychological support is also not widely available for these women.”

To read more about the story follow the link

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/features/2013/06/02/Women-in-Egypt-suffer-more-sexual-violence-under-Islamist-rule-.html>

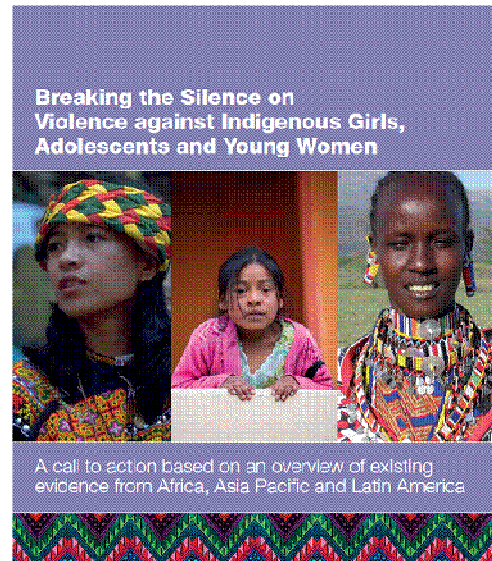
Violence Against Indigenous Girls, Adolescents, Young Women - Report

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples includes Article 22, which ensures that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination. At the time of negotiating this provision, the drafters knew that the contexts in which many indigenous women and girls live place them at risk of violence.

Even before the adoption of the declaration in 2007, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) had at its Fifth Session in 2006 recommended to United Nations organizations and States to provide comprehensive reports on violence against indigenous women and girls, particularly sexual violence and violence in settings of armed conflict. This study responds to that call. It finds that violence against these groups must be understood within the broader contexts of indigenous peoples' historic and continuing marginalization and discrimination, violations of their collective and individual rights, displacement, extreme poverty and often-limited access to culturally appropriate basic services and justice - a finding that is consistent with the views of the UNPFII and the International Indigenous Women's Forum. However, in all societies there are practices to keep, practices to change and practices to reconsider. While indigenous peoples continue to value and perpetuate their culture and way of life, we should not be exempt from this type of reflection. We hope this report will trigger change so that indigenous communities - women, men, girls and boys - can play their role in guaranteeing a life free from violence and discrimination for indigenous girls, adolescents and young women. As the study exposes gaps in research and data collection in regard to violence against these groups, it is the collective responsibility of States. Direct Link to Full 75-Page 2013 Report:

Direct Link to Full 75-Page 2013 Report:

http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/sites/default/files/documents/Breaking_the_Silence_on_Violence_against_Indigenous_Girls_Adolescents_and_Young_Women_Report.pdf



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