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NEWS & ARTICLES

GENDER ACTIVISM

Activists: Approval of domestic abuse bill a step forward for women in Lebanon

BEIRUT: Women's rights advocates welcomed a Parliament committee's endorsement

Monday of a draft law aimed at protecting women from domestic violence, but vowed to continue fighting to see the law strengthened and expanded.

"It's a small positive achievement," said Maya Ammar, a communications officer for the NGO KAFA, which has spearheaded the campaign to pass the law. "We knew we didn't get 100 percent of what we asked for but we're going to continue our work and keep up the pressure."



Among the most important aspects of the law, Ammar said, was the inclusion of protection mechanisms for women who report abuse. The version approved by the committee provides for the creation of a specialized section within the Internal Security Forces that will include more female officers and be trained to deal with domestic abuse.

This section would have the power to issue protection orders, analogous to restraining orders in the U.S. court system, and refer the woman to a shelter. The law also allows women to take their abusers to a civil rather than a religious court, and clarifies abuse penalties.

Activists have lobbied for the adoption of the draft law for the past three years, but ran into opposition from some lawmakers, particularly over matters pertaining to marital rape and religious courts.

According to the version that was approved Monday, the powers of the religious versus the civil courts are clearly outlined, a victory for activists. Marital rape remains a point of contention, as the law in its current form does not recognize it as sexual assault. Supporters of the original draft law would also like to see the language changed to make it less general and address women specifically.

"This law's not going to be a miracle but I think that the law allowed us to open this debate in society," Ammar said, adding that KAFA has already started training ISF personnel on how to deal with domestic abuse cases. "The law allowed us to work on the ground with the people and through local NGOs and the media to say that we cannot deal with violence as a private matter."

The latest victim of domestic violence to make the news was 31-year-old Roula Yaacoub, who was found beaten and comatose in the northern town of Halba earlier this month. Yaacoub died upon arrival to the hospital. She was allegedly beaten to death by her husband.

Her death pushed the domestic abuse issue to the forefront once more, sparking angry protests in Halba Sunday and Beirut Monday by activists urging Parliament to approve the law. The Joint Committees unanimously voted to approve the current draft Monday, and it is expected to be referred to Parliament for a vote during its next session, scheduled for next Monday.

Boushra Khoury, a relative of Roula Yaacoub, said she was happy that lawmakers were “on the right path.”

But Khoury added that Yaacoub’s friends and family hoped to see the law amended to include many of the original articles that had been taken out or weakened, including the one pertaining to marital rape.

“Roula’s death was a great wound but we hope this law will ensure that there will not be another Roula Yaacoub,” she said.

Some politicians also voiced their support for the law.

MP Strida Geagea has been a vocal supporter of the law in its original form, leading the Lebanese Forces’ boycott of the committee after some lawmakers removed articles and changed the language to weaken the legislation.

In a statement Monday, Geagea voiced support for the law, hinting that she, too, saw it as a start in a longer process of protecting women’s rights.

“The approval of this draft law is an important step in response to the efforts we have made to improve the status of Lebanese women, and thus enhance their visibility and prevent the exposure of their persons, dignity or rights to violence, exploitation and extortion,” Geagea said in a statement.

“What has been achieved ... is but one stop on a long march, and we wish it had been realized a long time ago, but regardless, it constitutes a breakthrough by providing opportunities to demonstrate the power of the Lebanese woman and her effective participation in building the nation and society.”

Kataeb MP Sami Gemayel also threw his support behind the bill, paying homage to Yaacoub, and expressing hope no other women would meet the same fate.

“This draft law makes violence against women subject to the civil court system and not to the religious courts, meaning that no one can speak of so-called ‘discipline’ [as a justification for domestic violence],” Gemayel said. “Any violence against women in the home or outside it will be subject to, from now on, after the adoption of the law, to the civil courts.” For more information, visit: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2013/Jul-23/224652-activists-domestic-abuse-bill-a-step-forward.ashx#axzz2ZqXilumQ>

Combating Sexual Harassment in Garment Factories in Jordan

Twice a week, training specialist, Rania Shanti, visits a garment factory in the industrial city of Sahab, Jordan, and talks to small groups of workers about sexual harassment.

She tries to create a comfortable and - crucially - confidential atmosphere that will encourage participants to speak freely.

One of them is Indrani, a Sri Lankan woman who has worked at the factory since 2009.

“I always thought that when women spoke about being sexually harassed, they meant they were raped. Now I understand that sexual harassment can take place in many different forms,” she says. “Now I understand that sexual harassment can take place in many different forms.” Like Indrani, many of the workers at



the factory are foreigners - mainly from Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh. So, Shanti, from the ILO's Better Work Jordan programme, often has to communicate through a translator. "It's difficult to assess sexual harassment in these factories due to the sensitive nature of the issue and fears of reprisals among workers. It's never guaranteed that the workers will label themselves as being victims of sexual harassment," she explains. Two years ago, allegations were made of widespread rape being committed against workers at one of Jordan's largest clothing factories. Although the allegations were not substantiated, reports of unwanted sexual advances towards workers are common across the global garment manufacturing sector. Better Work Jordan's own investigation found that many workers had very little understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment - even though concerned about it. As a result, Better Work Jordan launched a pilot sexual harassment prevention awareness project with Indrani's employer, the Jerash Garment and Fashion Manufacturing Company, which aims to teach line workers, managers and supervisors about how to identify, prevent and report instances of sexual harassment. During one session held in mid-June, Indrani joined a group of shy and soft-spoken women, who told fellow workers about being groped, having their skirts lifted and even being sexually assaulted by taxi drivers. "After the training, I now have a better idea of how to deal with the situation if something happens." Priyadorshani, another Sri Lankan worker at the factory, said the project helped them better understand Jordanian laws and regulations relating to sexual harassment in the workplace. "We are foreigners in Jordan, so we do not know much about the laws, rules and procedures," she said. "After the training, I now have a better idea of how to deal with the situation if something happens." Shanti notes that while some relevant laws exist, the most powerful and effective policies are those created and adopted internally by the factories, which address all forms of sexual harassment. "Part of the training is to help the factories create their own policy on sexual harassment prevention. We share our model policy, which they can adapt," she explains. "This has had a great impact on the factory's management, as it has given them a great sense of responsibility where they now feel that they are in charge of the situation and can take control." Sanil Kumar, the company's compliance officer, agrees. "The training helped the managers and supervisors on issues which they were not aware of before, such as certain forms of sexual harassment and how to prevent it or deal with it. And following advice from the Better Work team, we have developed our own internal sexual harassment prevention policy for the factory which has been adopted by the management." Following advice from the Better Work team, we have developed our own internal sexual harassment prevention policy for the factory." Unions are also trying to play a role says Mervat Abdel Kareem al-Jamhawi, of the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing. "We try to raise awareness of the issues among female workers in factories but there are many challenges, such as cultural and language barriers. It is definitely a high priority for us and we need more support from projects like Better Work Jordan to conduct more programmes in a range of factories." Better Work Jordan plans to help create independent counseling and referral systems for workers who feel sexually harassed or under threat. The pilot project will also extend to several other factories next year - some of which employ up to 7,000 workers from as many as eight countries. "We will continue with our training," says Shanti. "We will continue to spread our message, especially to migrant workers, by telling them that they are not victims, they are not weak. They have come from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh and other parts of the world to work here, so they must be strong women," she said. "They need to know that there are actions that can be taken. If they don't want to talk to their managers about sexual harassment, they can talk to us." For more information follow the link

http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/07_13/07_01/070113_jordan.htm

Launching of "Stand with Women who Stand for Democracy" campaign

The Arab revolts which have started in December 2010 have generated a most unprecedented change in the Arab world. Indeed, the past era has witnessed significant youth involvement, a visible and vocal participation of women demanding change as well as a greater space for organizing and free speech. However, the new powers that have occupied the political vacuum in the Arab region are mostly conservative Islamist with a clear vision of what society should be. The discourse and the practices in the region have clearly sought to marginalize, exclude and often intimidate women and girls. Given this context, the "Women Learning Partnership for Rights, Development and Peace" which includes women from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, Bahrain and Morocco, is launching the Stand with Women Who Stand for Democracy Campaign which kicked off on July 1st. The campaign, which include online and offline activities, is meant to raise global awareness that democracy will not be achieved "in the Arab region nor elsewhere" without the full participation of women and equal human rights for all citizens. We urge you to actively take part in this campaign (through checking the attachment) and watch its insightful documentary (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HI-rTyO1W3Y>) that seeks to share the voices and aspirations of women for true democracy and equality. Follow the link for more information <http://www.learningpartnership.org/ourcauseisjust>



Activists in Lebanon urge MPs to pass domestic violence law

A number of activists protested in Riad al-Solh Square in Beirut urging MPs to approve a draft law to protect women from domestic violence. Female activists chanted slogans asking politicians to take a stance and end violence against women while holding banners that read, "Your silence is killing them every day." They voiced particular concern over the fact that women's rights are largely unprotected in Lebanon's legal code. A national television and billboard campaign was recently launched by the National Coalition for a Law to Protect Women from Domestic Violence, in partnership with KAFA, to pressure lawmakers to outlaw domestic violence under the slogan "I did not die but many others have." During the protest, activists also demanded that Speaker Nabih Berri, who in 2009 had pushed for a law against domestic abuse, add the draft bill to the Parliament's agenda for this week. The bill was finalized by a parliamentary committee last year. Activist and spokeswoman Hayat Mirshad said 24 women had been killed in cases of domestic violence between 2010 and 2013, adding that many still suffer today but are too frightened to speak out. "These women are the primary victims of a male-oriented society, where members of Parliament and religious leaders are intent on treating them as second-class citizens," she said. KAFA first submitted a draft law to protect women from domestic violence to the Parliament in 2010, and a parliamentary subcommittee began studying it in May 2011 and finalized its amendments in August 2012. The amendments altered the title of the text, which now refers to violence against the family, as opposed to women specifically. A key clause to

make marital rape illegal was removed by the committee, the reason being that marriage implied sexual consent between a husband and wife. The draft calls for the criminalization of different forms of violence against women, the creation of specialized police units to follow up on transgressions and specify punishment for offenders, and the appointment of public prosecutors in each district to oversee matters relating to family violence and to allow women and their children to obtain restraining orders against their abusers. Of the 128-member Parliament, 43 supported the draft law in 2012, mainly members from the Lebanese Forces, the Free Patriotic



Movement, the Future Movement and the Kataeb Party. Dar al-Fatwa, Lebanon's highest Sunni authority, opposed the draft law, expressing concern that passing the bill would diminish a father's familial authority. It also stated, along with the Higher Shiite Islamic Council, that Shariah law protects women in society. The latest victim of domestic violence was 31-year-old Roula Yaacoub, who was found beaten and comatose in the northern town of Halba after midnight last week. Yaacoub died upon arrival to the hospital. Her husband, Karam al-Bazzi, was said to have beaten her and their five daughters regularly, according to their neighbors, who discovered Yaacoub in her home. The family of the victim, joined by residents of Halba, held a protest to demand the arrest of Bazzi. "Roula was not the first victim and she won't be the last," spokeswoman Mirshad told The Daily Star, explaining that Sunday's protest was a symbolic one aimed at both rallying support for Yaacoub and calling for the approval of the draft law. "It doesn't matter who supports the bill and who opposes it. All 128 MPs are responsible for the deaths that result from domestic violence." To read more <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2013/Jul-15/223671-activists-urge-mps-to-pass-domestic-violence-law.ashx#ixzz2ZOF5jdiq>

Turkish Women Push Back Against Patriarchy



Among the many issues bringing protestors together at Gezi Park, the now-iconic site of struggle in Istanbul's Taksim Square, is the demand for women's liberation. Coming from many walks of life and expressing a myriad of ideals and values, the women of the Occupy Gezi Movement have nevertheless voiced a collective desire: to fight the undercurrent of deeply entrenched patriarchal values and reclaim autonomy over their own bodies and lifestyles. These demands are now coalescing around proposed legislation

from the country's Health Ministry that will call on pharmacies to limit the sale of oral contraception known as the morning-after pill only to those with a doctor's prescription, a

practice that is uncommon for most drugs available to the public here. Under Turkey's conservative-leaning Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, women are encouraged to have at least three children to help maintain population growth rates. Feminists and women's rights groups representing almost 400 people say the new legislation is part of government attempts to impose traditional values onto their lifestyle, and will only reinforce stereotypes about the "ideal" Turkish woman, while stigmatising those who stray from this image. "I can't go to the family doctor (for my contraceptive needs) because it is a secretive issue for me," said Merve Kosar, a 26-year-old Istanbulite who relies on the pharmacy to replenish her supply of the drug. In Turkey, most non-narcotic drugs are available for purchase over the counter. Insisting on a prescription from a family doctor, who can report to other members of the family, places added pressure on women to conform to conservative mores. Women like Kosar, who make the conscious decision to have sex before marriage, are worried about having fewer options to guard against unwanted pregnancies. Nearly 34 percent of once-married and currently married women said they use morning-after pills as their main form of contraception, according to the 2008 Turkey Demographic and Health Survey. Still, the possibility of parliament passing the bill under a larger package of reforms sometime this year seems likely and concerns women's rights groups who say the announcement will hinder some from asking pharmacies for pills. An [article](#) in the Hurriyet Daily News cited a notice from the Health Ministry, which stated that "growth hormones, antibiotics, antidepressants, and antihistamines" must be sold with a doctor's prescription to reduce the misuse of drugs. According to Zerrin Guker, a pharmacist in the commercial neighbourhood of Karakoy who sells 15 to 20 boxes of the morning-after pill per month, some customers have been misusing the drug by purchasing it a few times per week, which can cause hormonal side effects. A 27-year-old protestor named Elif, who declined to give her last name for fear of retribution, said she suffered blood clots and nausea after taking the pill once; yet she still believes in a woman's right to choose and says the government's proposed restriction is designed to prevent unmarried women from having sexual relationships. "Most women can't even buy tampons or feminine products from stores because they are ashamed," she told IPS, stressing that the culture of shame has become entrenched in society. A long fight to overturn these attitudes is slowly showing results: ideals about abstinence until marriage, for instance, are shrinking, as women continue to speak out about their grievances with men including harassment and sexist swearing, practices that have infiltrated the Occupy Gezi Movement. At a recent meeting in Yogurtçu Park in Istanbul's Kadikoy district, more than 100 women gathered to discuss their experiences at Gezi Park. One protestor said a drunken man grabbed her buttocks one night, while bystanders justified his actions saying he had been under the influence. Another woman read out a list of complaints with the governing party, which included attempts to get rid of "dekolte" (low-cut dresses) and state attempts to ban abortions and "keep women at home." A year ago, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan called for tighter restrictions on reproductive health by drafting a bill that would shorten the time period in which women can have an abortion from 10 weeks to eight weeks. "There is no difference between killing the foetus in a mother's womb or killing a person after birth," Erdogan said in a speech before female politicians in the capital, Ankara, last year. His words drew the ire of around 3,000 to 4,000 protestors, mostly women, who marched against the anti-abortion law in Kadikoy last June, waving banners proclaiming statements such as: "It is my body, so who are you?" When abortion became legal in 1983, the Turkish Population and Health Survey found that 37 percent of once-married Turkish women had at least one abortion. As of 2008, that figure stood at 14.8 abortions per 1,000 women. While the latest call to limit oral contraception has yet to spark demonstrations, many believe it will eventually ignite the tensions that have been simmering for years now. Ayse Dulkan, journalist and activist, believes the outcry will pick up momentum, with more people

rebelling against the “conservative concept (that) women (must) stay home and raise children.” Such ideals, she told IPS, have resulted in Turkey having the world’s second highest population growth rate after China. Selime Buyukgoze, a volunteer at Mor Cati, an Istanbul-based network for battered women, called the proposal “problematic” since the morning-after pill must be taken within 72 hours of having unprotected sex and few women will be able to reach their doctors that soon. Like most others, though, her biggest fear is that doctors will break a woman’s confidence by reporting her lifestyle to the family. Ahmet Kaya, a family doctor who sees almost 150 patients a week, rebukes that claim. “If your patient doesn’t want you to inform her family, you can’t make that call,” he told IPS. At the moment, pharmacies are continuing to sell the pill without asking for a prescription. It remains to be seen whether or not the government will push ahead with the law, or whether it will respond to the will of more than 1.5 million female protesters. To read more follow the link <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/07/turkish-women-push-back-against-patriarchy/>

Saudi Women’s Rights Activists to File Prison Appeal

Two Saudi Arabian women’s rights activists are filing an appeal after being sentenced to 10 months in prison for helping a woman who had allegedly been abused by her husband. On Jun. 15, Wajeha Al-Huwaider and Fawzia Al-Oyouni were convicted by a district court in Al-Khobar of “takhbib”, an element of shari’a law that states they incited a woman to defy her husband and supported a wife without her husband’s knowledge. A two-year travel ban will follow their prison term. The women came to the assistance of a Canadian woman, Nathalie Morin, who called Al-Huwaider asking for help after being locked in a room by her husband without adequate food or water. But as the women approached her house they were ambushed and arrested, Suad Abu-Dayyeh, programme consultant on Middle East and North Africa for Equality Now, told IPS. Equality Now, an international human rights organisation, is calling on supporters to send letters in preparation for the appeal deadline on Friday, Jul. 12. “They did not



conspire to turn Nathalie against her husband or attempt to convince her to abandon him. In fact, they have never met her,” Abu-Dayyeh told IPS. Abu-Dayyeh believes the allegations against the women are false and that Saudi Arabia is instead cracking down on the two women for their history of human rights activism. “The Saudi government has clearly created a scenario whereby Fawzia and Wajeha, brave women who wanted to help another woman in need, were arrested for the activism they carry out,” Abu-Dayyeh said. “These two women have been activists for a long time, and the Saudi government has been keen to silence them for a long time. They are now being made an example of to ensure that other activists don’t speak out either,” Abu-Dayyeh added. Al-Huwaider and Al-Oyouni have been active in a number of human and women’s campaigns in Saudi Arabia, including Women2Drive, which encouraged women to defy Saudi Arabia’s ban on women driving. In a YouTube video filmed on Women’s Day in 2008, Al-Huwaider is seen driving around an empty countryside and talking to online supporters from the driver’s seat. Saudi Arabia follows very conservative interpretations of Islamic law that forbids women from driving. Last year, Al-Huwaider was listed as number 82 on Arabian Business’ list of the 100 most powerful Arab women, but she was missing from the list this year. She is also the co-founder of Association for the Protection and Defence of Women’s Rights in Saudi Arabia. “These

two women are being persecuted for their work on human rights and women’s rights,” Joe Stork, deputy director of the Middle East and North Africa division at Human Rights Watch, told IPS. “It’s not a criminal offence.” The application of “takhbib”, where a man or woman interferes with a marriage or engagement, turning one spouse against another, is curious in this case, and it is possible that it is being used to mask what authorities see as the real crime: Al-Huwaider’s and Al-Oyouni’s activism. “It seems a little unusual from the point of view of classical Islamic law, which may not line up with current Saudi practice... takhbib is more usually associated with seducing a woman to leave or divorce her husband, or marry somebody unauthorised,” Marion Katz, associate professor in the Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies department at New York University, told IPS. When Al-Huwaider was first questioned over a year ago about the incident, the questions authorities asked were mainly about her work as a human and women’s rights activist, Stork said. The success of Friday’s appeal, based on Saudi Arabia’s track record, seems unlikely, Stork said. “I wouldn’t count on it,” Stork said. “[Saudi Arabia] has made a decision to really stamp out human rights activism.” On the ground in Saudi Arabia, gaining support is difficult for Al-Huwaider and Al-Oyouni, as women cannot speak out freely in the country and the government controls the media. “The rights of women and girls are often deeply compromised,” Abu-Dayyeh said. “In Saudi Arabia, there are no civil society organisations that can pick up such issues.” Despite recent small glimmers of positive developments to improve and expand the rights of women in Saudi Arabia, including sending its first female athlete, Sarah Attar, to the Olympic Games in London last year and giving girls in private schools the right to play sports, as well as allowing women to ride bikes, the case of the two activists is a step backwards for the Kingdom. “Saudi Arabia still needs to do a lot more to ensure that women and girls are protected and that their fundamental human rights are safeguarded,” Abu-Dayyeh stated, pointing out, “Allowing this to happen would benefit the entire society.” To read more about this issue follow the link <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/07/saudi-womens-rights-activists-to-file-prison-appeal-friday/>

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

The Politics of Sexual Violence in Protest Spaces in Egypt

There was a new wave of sexual assault against women in Tahrir Square but women refused to let the assaults on their bodies silence their voices. These attacks were commensurate with the pattern of politically motivated sexual violence that emerged, and grew, under the Muslim Brotherhood’s reign,



argues Mariz Tadros . When Tam arod “Rebel”, a youth led initiative called for a mass revolt against the Egyptian government on the 30th of June to impeach the president and declare early elections, some were worried that half the population- women- would not turn up. Since the informal political ascendancy of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2011, and the coming to power of President Morsi on the 1st of July 2012, a pattern emerged of organized, targeted sexual assault on women in protest spaces. It is believed that these acts of sexual

violence are neither random nor of the same nature as social forms of sexual harassment prevalent in society. It is believed that the ultimate aim of these targeted assaults is political: to intimidate the women and their families from allowing them to join protests against the status quo. Though the army and the former Mubarak regime were both responsible for using sexual assault to oppress the dissenters, the use of sexual assault increased both in number and intensity after the Brotherhood became politically empowered. If the intention of these politically motivated acts of sexual assault was to compel women to stay at home, it did not work. Out of the roughly 17 million or so who revolted on the 30th of June, no less than half of them were women. The presence of women of all ages, and backgrounds in these protests excelled that of the Egyptian revolution of January 2011. Rural women and women from the Delta and Upper Egypt who had a very low level of participation in the 25th of January revolts of 2011 were the first to take to the streets on the 30th of June. Coptic women who have conventionally been the top target of the Islamists in assault [partly because they represent disproportionately the highest percentage of non-veiled women) had transformed their choir hymns into subversive songs about the men in beards who gaze at the nakedness of their “exposed toe nails”. But weeks before the 30th of June, anti-sexual harassment groups had started to plan for the protests, predicting that opponents of the revolt [read the Brotherhood and their Islamist allies] would strike again, using sexual violence to clear the protest spaces. And it happened. On Friday the 28th June as protestors filled Tahrir Square, there were five cases of sexual assault, the women were transferred to hospital unconscious. What was striking about these assaults was that they followed exactly the same pattern followed in previous incidents of sexual violence in protest spaces. For one, they happened by encircling these women, blocking outsiders from getting through to save them, and collectively assaulting them using extreme violence and sustaining the attacks over a long duration of time. A Dutch journalist was gang raped and suffered severe injuries that required hospitalization. Two days later, on the day of the biggest protest ever, OpantiSh (Operation Anti-sexual assault) documented 46 cases of sexual assault against women protestors in Tahrir, some involving their violation with sharp objects. On the 30th June, Essam el Haddad, the presidential advisor stated in a press conference that the incidents of sexual assault in Tahrir Square were regrettable and he blamed the protestors who were “out of control”. To read more about the issue, visit the site <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/mariz-tadros/egypt-politics-of-sexual-violence-in-protest-spaces>

Also in Egypt, Women Demand Democracy, Leadership Inclusion, End VAW

Reporting from Egypt: Hoda Elsadda, Global Fund for Women board member and Vice President of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, sent an E-mail to say that international media is missing the point. Demanding the resignation of President Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood isn't the end of democracy in Egypt, rather it is democracy in action:



"[The international media's] insistence on repeating the Muslim Brotherhood mantra that the ouster of the first democratically elected president is the end of democracy is a gross

abuse of the essential meaning of democracy and a reflection of the trivialization of democratic processes by reducing them to electoral politics only.

If this is the situation of democracy in the U.S. then you are well advised to take a step back and learn from Egypt. Egyptians refuse the definition of democracy as elections only (one brilliant Egyptian coined the term 'ballotocracy' to describe this abuse of the concept).

Mohamed Morsi has impeached himself by violating the contract made between him and the people who elected him. And just as a reminder, Hitler was also a democratically elected president whose election cost millions of lives and a world war. Well, we Egyptians want to get rid of Morsi and his clan right here and now and save the world and ourselves more bloodshed and agony.

A final word to the American administration: please, please, stop supporting dictators."

Documenting Sexual Harassment

As Egypt rejects "ballotocracy" in Tahrir Square, getting to this point was fraught with violence. Women have documented at least 101 cases of sexual harassment in six days, according to Global Fund for Women grantee partner, Nazra for Feminist Studies.

Unfortunately, sexual harassment and rape during times of conflict is not news for Global Fund for Women and our grantee partners. Fortunately, with social media, women's organizations are documenting harassment in real time. Nazra for Feminist Studies has been instrumental in promoting anti-violence hotlines like Operation Anti Sexual Harassment and other support services for women being raped in the streets.

A Movement Demanding Democracy

During the 2011 Egyptian revolution, the impact of 20+ years of vital core support from Global Fund for Women played out in a big way. It helped build strong networks of women's rights activists in the Middle East and North Africa, enabling women like Hoda and Mozn Hassan to mobilize quickly and lead during turbulent times. Today, these are the networks demanding democracy in their country today and standing against rape and violence as an intimidation tactic. To read more about the issue follow the link http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/07_13/07_01/070113_egypt3.htm

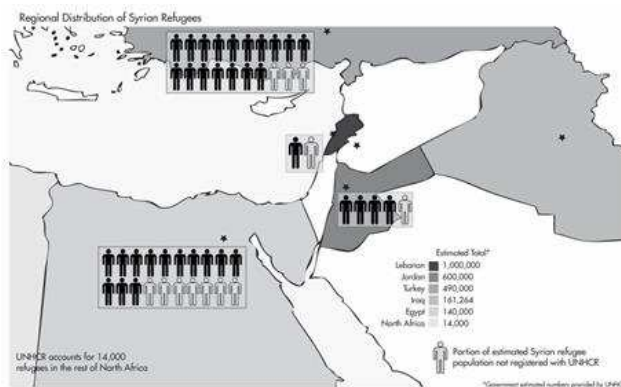
Underage refugee marriages on the rise on the borders between Lebanon and Syria

Ramona Idriss, a psychologist based in the Bekaa Valley town of Taanayel, recalls a patient whom she says exemplifies the dangers associated with early age marriage among Syrian refugees. She was 9, and had just married her 21-year-old cousin. Prior to reciting marriage

vows, the girl knew nothing of the male anatomy, let alone the duties relating to child-rearing, largely because she was a child herself.

That night, her mother-in-law heard her petrified screams in the room next door, where custom dictates the marriage be consummated directly after the ceremony. The mother walked in on the newlyweds and demanded that the girl relent her protest, perform her duty as a wife, or else she would tie her legs to the bedposts and see it through herself.

"She was afraid and she accepted," recounted Idriss, who works for Himaya, a nonprofit which seeks to help victims of child abuse. "When I met her she told me how painful it was, that she had begun hemorrhaging but that her husband did not stop."



The girl soon developed claustrophobia, according to her psychologist, a fear of being closed in small spaces, one of the psychological manifestations of having to be “closed up in a room and forced to have intercourse.” But this particular case does not represent the experience of most refugees who marry early. There are some who want to get married, Idriss emphasized, relaying the case of a 14-year-old who fell in love with another 20-year-old refugee. But her tender age and little exposure to sexual education rendered her uninformed of what a healthy sex life entailed: “She still has no idea that females can climax during intercourse.” Social workers report an increase in the prevalence of early age marriage among the Syrian refugee communities. The tent settlement of the Akkar town of Bibine, for instance, saw a rise in such marriages with refugee parents marrying off their daughters, some as young as 13, upon arrival from the war-torn Syrian city of Qusair. Most cited fears that their daughters would be exploited in the overcrowded gatherings and the unfamiliar host community as the central reason. Social workers make the case that early marriage, ironically, actually increases the risk of exploitation and constitutes a form of gender-based violence, which not only compromises the health of the child but violates her rights enshrined in international conventions. Getting a hold of statistics about early marriage is not easy, said Jihane Latrous, a gender-based violence specialist working for UNICEF. With the anecdotal data reported from the field, Latrous expressed concern that early marriage was a trend among the Syrian refugee population, one that was on the rise and affecting unprecedentedly younger brides.

The data she does have, she believes, represents just “the tip of the iceberg,” because it’s so hard to come by. “It’s a traditional practice pre-existing displacement. Early marriage was present in Syria to some extent and now it continues,” Latrous said.

However, “the reasons why they were getting married in Syria are not the same reasons why they are doing it here,” she said, pointing to dire financial difficulties as a primary factor.

Now, she added, Syrians are marrying off their young girls because of the vulnerabilities arising from displacement. One reason, commonly cited by parents, is to ward off harassment “so the girls can be under the protection of a male.” Girls are more at risk of facing harassment according to Latrous. Based on anecdotal accounts, there is a discernable drop in the average age of the brides. According to studies, a complex web of factors contribute to high rates of early marriage in a given community, including poverty, weak legislative frameworks and implementation, harmful traditional practices, gender discrimination and a lack of educational opportunities for girls. Moreover, a substantial body of evidence amassed by a World Vision study suggests that early marriages increase in the immediate aftermath of conflict, as a response to crisis and is considered by communities to be the best possible way to protect its children. Families naturally fear the insecurity stemming from crisis situations, and anticipate a rise in sexual violence and by extension, pregnancies outside of marriage and family dishonor.

Furthermore, these insecure settings propagate certain fears which cause parents to resort to early marriage as a means to protect their children against the risks, regardless of their authenticity. On average, Syrian girls are married to either fellow Syrians within the refugee community or suitors from the host community, at times for a small dowry amount, which itself can range from as little as \$200, as in one case reported in Akkar, to well over \$500.

But there are risks associated with early marriage, social workers argue: For one, women who marry young are more likely to normalize marital abuse and rape. Moreover, in Lebanon, they are at a higher risk of being sexually exploited, as the majority of child trafficking cases in the country were carried out under the pretext of child marriage. According to statistics compiled by the Internal Security Forces, early child marriage is the principle means through which young children are trafficked. From data compiled in the last four years, of the 19 children identified as victims of sexual exploitation, 12 were brought from Syria, marriage being the primary means. But the practice predates the Syrian crisis,

as the first case was reported in February 2010. The narrative of how the victims entered the country and were manipulated into sex work is typical. It usually begins with a Lebanese scout, posing as a man seeking a young bride in rural Syria. In the first such network that was dismantled by the ISF, the male culprit had paid the girl's father \$300 as a dowry, and then sold her to the Lebanese "madame" for \$500, walking away with a meager profit of \$200. To read the entire article follow the link more:

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2013/Jul-18/224081-underage-refugee-marriages-on-the-rise.ashx#ixzz2ZOCuUMqS>

Also in Sudan... it is Time to Let Sudan's Girls Be Girls, Not Brides

Lawyers and rights activists are calling for a change in Sudan's laws which allow for the marriage of girls as young as 10.

It is time, they say, that Sudan's laws recognise gender equality so that the country's girls and young women can take control of their lives and leave behind the cycle of child marriage and abuse.

"(Activists) are advocating a change in the personal status laws as they discriminate against women and aim to keep them in the household," said Khadija Al-Dowahi, from the Sudanese Organisation for Research and Development (SORD), which conducts research on child marriage. Sudan's 1991 Personal Status Law of Muslims does not grant



women equal rights. It also promotes child marriage. Article 40 of the personal status law sets no age limit for marriage and in fact states that a 10-year-old girl can be married "with the permission of a judge". "The personal status laws basically state that girls can get married when they are old enough to be able to comprehend matters ... but you could easily say that girls understand matters at the age of 10," Al-Dowahi told IPS. In addition, Sudan has not ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The U.N. Children's Fund estimates that a third of Sudanese women now aged 20 to 24 were married before the age of 18. In rural areas, where the problem is more persistent, child marriage is as high as 39 percent as opposed to 22 percent in urban areas.

A visit to Khartoum Hospital shows clearly just how widespread the phenomenon of child marriage is in Sudan. Inside, there is an entire Obstetric Fistula ward - the patients there are mostly young mothers whose bodies are too underdeveloped to allow them to give birth, making them prone to developing fistula. Amel Al-Zein, a lawyer who has researched the issue of child marriage, is very critical of the country's personal status laws. "Unlike other countries in the region or Islamic countries per se, it does not specify a certain age for marriage, which is the only guarantee to controlling child marriage," Al-Zein told IPS. Al-Zein stated that women could not go to court to get a divorce or undertake any legal procedures before the age of 18, which contradicts the fact that girls as young as 10 are married. "When we began researching issues of gender justice, we started seeing how child marriage is interlinked to many issues facing women, the women go to courts to fight over

custody and get a divorce only to discover how terrible and discriminatory the laws are,” said Al-Dowahi, whose organisation has proposed reforms to the laws.

SORD has recently established a legal aid centre for women being discriminated against by the personal status laws. So far 46 cases have arrived at the centre since its inception three months ago. Meanwhile, the Council of Sudanese Scholars, a prestigious religious body, is causing controversy. Last year when its secretary-general, Prof. Mohamed Osman Salah, spoke in favour of child marriage, activists became infuriated.

Salah told the press in October 2012: “Islam encourages youth to marry to save them from perversion or any dangers of being single and to make them happy and to preserve reproduction.” Not all religious scholars share Salah’s opinion. This is mainly because child marriage in Sudan is a consequence of social and cultural traditions, not only religious values. Sarah Mohamed, for example, was married off at 13 years old because the nearest high school for girls was too far from her village - lack of access to education makes parents less likely to keep daughters at home. This is not an unusual age for getting married in her small village of Karko, which lies in Southern Kordofan. “I remember how confused I felt, I had no idea what marriage is, I was a child,” Mohamed, who turned 30 a few weeks ago and now has five children, told IPS. She had her firstborn at 16 and today very few people can believe that she has a son in high school. Rana Ahmed had a different experience. She was 15 when her mother discovered that she was dating a boy in her neighbourhood, after she caught her speaking to him on the phone. “She became too upset and told me that she would find me a husband before I did something really bad. She said this would make me stop playing around,” Ahmed, now 24, told IPS. Her husband, who was in his late 30s at the time, took Rana abroad, where he worked as a doctor, for five years. When they returned to Sudan, with her two young children, she felt that she wanted to live again.

“I was bored and unfulfilled in my life, I wanted to experience what girls my age experience. I wanted to have the freedom to date and go out,” said Ahmed who is now divorced. Al-Dowahi said that Ahmed’s story is not unique - young girls are not ready for family responsibilities or for sexual experience. Some end up succeeding and going back to school, but others cannot cope and end up having affairs and living a quite different life.

As Sudan’s economic situation continues to deteriorate, activists have said that cities are themselves becoming similar to rural areas, with child marriage becoming a pressing problem even among the educated urban communities.

“Before we observed more marriages of girls in agricultural communities ... now it is increasing in cities because of the economic situation and the attempt by families to preserve their girls from the corruption of the city,” said Al-Zein. SORD’s research showed that women in camps for internally displaced persons and in east Sudan usually face early marriage more than others. In fact, east Sudan is home to the youngest divorcee - a young girl who was granted a divorce when she was nine. In the traditions of her community, girls are married at the age of two months, and taken to their husbands after they reach 10 years of age. Lakshmi Sundaram, global coordinator of Girls not Brides, a global partnership to end child marriage, thinks it is a question of the value placed on the girl-child.

“We have to challenge converting a girl, even with her consent, into an economic commodity. We have to address the fundamental aspect that a girl has intrinsic value as a human being, not just a value cost,” Sundaram told IPS. To read more about this issue follow the link <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/07/time-to-let-sudans-girls-be-girls-not-brides/>

... and in South Sudan Women without Men are Vulnerable in Refugee Camps

Mahasa sits in the dust outside the hut she built herself, holding her youngest son in her arms. The 29-year-old mother of four knows how vulnerable she is. “I’m scared,” she said. Mahasa is one of many women who have fled, unaccompanied by their husbands, to Maban

County in South Sudan's Upper Nile State, escaping the fighting in Sudan's Blue Nile State between government forces and the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North. Mahasa's husband is still in Blue Nile, fighting alongside the rebels. She now lives in Doro camp, which houses more than 44,000 refugees. There, she - like other female refugees - faces daily threats of harassment, exploitation and violence, and the persistent fear that, as a woman, she will be unable to provide for her family. The fighting in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, which started in June 2011, has so far displaced more than 112,000 civilians to South Sudan. Humanitarians say they were "overwhelmed" during the rainy season in the second half of 2012, as tens of thousands of refugees, most of them women and children, came pouring across the border from Blue Nile State. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and its partners scrambled to meet the basic needs of the new arrivals, who initially slept under trees and survived on fruit and stagnant groundwater. Now, six months later, fighting continues across the border, but the rate of arrivals has eased and aid agencies are transitioning from emergency response mode to meeting the longer-term needs of the refugee population. More than 80 percent of the refugees are women and children, says Myrat Muradov, a protection officer with UNHCR. The agency has begun to look at the particular vulnerabilities of this group, many of whom are completely dependent on



food rations. "Widows and pregnant women need much help," he said. Because the camps are spread out across large areas, women often have to walk very long distances to reach food distributions points, and then they must carry the heavy ration bags back with them. Mahasa, for example, walks half an hour in each direction to collect the food she needs to feed her children. Aid workers say that on these collection journeys, single women and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, sometimes being forced to part with a portion of their ration in exchange for assistance transporting it. However, this is not the crime Mahasa fears most. One of the most difficult things she and other women must do is collect firewood from the bush surrounding the camp; not only is it hard work, it is also "dangerous," she says, because members of the host community often approach and harass female refugees. "They hit us," Mahasa says. "They also take the axe from us." Tensions between the refugees and the host community have been mounting, largely over increasingly limited resources. Maple, an older woman in the camp, and Talitha, her adult daughter, express similar fears, reporting that both men and women from the host community have hit them with sticks and chased them away as they tried to collect firewood. "The only way to get the firewood is to hide yourself in order to protect yourself from the host community," Maple said. The issue is of growing concern for protection officers working in the four refugees camps of Maban County. Firewood collection "exposes women to humongous risks in terms of sexual violence," one officer working in the camps told IRIN. To continue reading the story follow the link http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/07_13/07_08/070813_south.htm

Iran- Two women prisoners given (temporary) release

On Sunday July 23, 2013, the Islamic Republic regime used Sha'baan, the holy month of Islam to temporarily release Nasrin Sotoudeh from Evin Prison. She is an award-winning lawyer, human rights activist and mother of two who is sentenced to six years in prison. Jila Baniyaghoob, award-winning journalist, women's rights activist, and spouse of imprisoned journalist Bahman Ahmadi Amouie, was also released from Evin on the same day after she had reached the end of her one-year prison sentence.



Following their releases Nasrin Sotoudeh (center) and Jila Baniyaghoob (second from the left) were embraced by friends, family and colleagues, including: journalist Nazanin Khosravani (far left), Ms. Sotoudeh's husband Reza Khandan (back, center) and daughter Mehraveh (third from right), and political activist Asal Esmaeilzadeh (second from right). Ms. Sotoudeh's son, five-year-old Nima, is standing closely beside his mother.

Nasrin Sotoudeh

A member of the Defenders of Human Rights Center, the One Million Signatures Campaign to Change Discriminatory Laws against Women, and the Society for Protecting the Rights of the Child.

Before her arrest in September 2010 Nasrin Sotoudeh had represented a long list of Iranian activists and individuals on death row (E.g. juvenile offenders, political prisoners). **Some of her more well-known clients are:** imprisoned journalists Isa Saharkhiz and Keyvan Samimi, imprisoned political activist Heshmatollah Tabarzadi, imprisoned student activists Zia Nabavi and Shabnam Madadzadeh, and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi. Additionally, Ms. Sotoudeh was the lawyer working on the cases of Arash Rahmanipour and Iranian-Dutch citizen Zahra Bahrami, who were both executed following the Islamic Republic's 2009 Presidential election. During the post-election aftermath Ms. Sotoudeh [also represented](#) the families of Meysam Ebadi and Ahmad Nejati-Kargar, two individuals who were killed during street protests.

In January 2010, after Mr. Rahmanipour was executed, regime authorities put Ms. Sotoudeh under pressure for talking to foreign media about the unlawful nature of her client's arrest and conviction. [She told](#) the German news site Deutsche Welle: "They did not allow me to attend [Mr. Rahmanipour's] interrogation session or his trial. When I insisted...they threatened me with arrest. They even confiscated my license."

In August 2010, regime security forces raided Ms. Sotoudeh's office and confiscated her computers' hard drives. According to her husband the arrest warrant read: "Nasrin Sotoudeh, accused of collusion and acting against national security." Independent sources believe Ms. Sotoudeh was under pressure at that time for her defense of Ms. Bahrami, who was sent to prison in 2009 and was held there until her execution in late January 2011.

A week before the Islamic Republic executed Ms. Bahrami, her daughter Banafsheh Nayeypour told an Iranian opposition website: “[Nasrin Sotoudeh] bravely defended my mother and was the only person who gave an interview to a Dutch newspaper and said that the charges related to ‘possession of narcotics’ is fabricated. I think it’s because [Ms. Sotoudeh] spread news and defended her clients that it landed her in trouble (i.e. imprisonment).”

Ms. Sotoudeh [was arrested](#) on September 4, 2010, after she had arrived to Evin Prison as per a summons order. According to Mr. Khandan, because his wife had not anticipated arrest and thought they would only hold her for an hour, she did not say her goodbyes to him or their children. Announcing the news to Deutsche Welle, Mr. Khandan also revealed that Islamic Republic officials had threatened him and his wife’s lawyers with arrest in the event they gave interviews to the media.

Three weeks after her arrest Ms. Sotoudeh launched a hunger strike to protest against the violation of her rights as an imprisoned Iranian citizen. Ms. Sotoudeh was banned from phone and visitation rights. She broke her hunger strike after one month, in late October 2010, when she was permitted a visit from her sister. However, in November 2010, Ms. Sotoudeh launched another hunger strike to protest against the mishandling of her case file. This time she refused water as well, staging a dry hunger strike. Overall Ms. Sotoudeh has staged more than four lengthy hunger strikes throughout the first two years of her imprisonment, and her physical health has suffered as a result. She has been connected to IVs a multiple times and suffered from digestive problems. Mr. Khandan [said in media](#) interview from 2010: “I didn’t recognize Nasrin because her face was so gaunt. She weighed 125 Lbs. when she was arrested, but since her incarceration she has lost approximately 28 Lbs.”

Throughout her imprisonment Ms. Sotoudeh has been held in solitary confinement for long durations without any contact with the outside world and has been repeatedly interrogated and psychologically tortured.

On November 15, 2010, Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, presided by Judge PirAbassi, charged Ms. Sotoudeh with “Acting against national security” and “Propaganda against the regime”. In January 2011, Judge PirAbassi sentenced Ms. Sotoudeh to 11 years in prison and banned her from practicing law and leaving the country for 20 years. She was issued one year in prison for “Propaganda against the regime” and ten years for “Acting against national security” and “Violating the Islamic dress code (hijab) during a filmed speech”. In the same month, regime authorities summoned Mr. Khandan in for questioning and detained him for one day.

In September 2011, Branch 54 of the Appeals Court reduced Ms. Sotoudeh’s 11-year prison sentence to six years and her 20-year ban from leaving the country and practicing law to 10 years. Nasrin Sotoudeh is the recipient of several human rights awards, including the first annual Human Rights Prize in 2008 awarded by Human Rights International Italy. Regime officials stopped Ms. Sotoudeh at the airport as she was attempting to travel to Italy to attend the ceremony. To compensate for her absence, Ms. Sotoudeh submitted a [video recording](#) of her acceptance speech. Ms. Sotoudeh is also the recipient of the 2011 PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award, and the European Parliament’s Sakharov Prize which she won along with filmmaker Jafar Panahi.

Earlier this month a ceremony was held for Ms. Sotoudeh in Toronto, Canada to recognize her most recent achievement, receiving an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from York University. From prison Ms. Sotoudeh [wrote](#) a message of gratitude to the university.

Jila Baniyaghoob

Jila Baniyaghoob is a prominent Iranian journalist and women's rights activist who has written mainly for pro-reform publications based in Iran. The content of her work, which focuses on social and economic issues in Iran, has landed Ms. Baniyaghoob in trouble with the Islamic Republic authorities and has resulted in her arrest several times. She is also the editor in chief of [a website](#) that publishes content related to women's issues in Iran.

Ms. Baniyaghoob's first arrest occurred in 2006 while she was at the University of Tehran reporting on a violent raid by regime security forces on a protest in support of women's rights. She was arrested for the second time in March 2007 during a rally for International Women's Day. She was held in Evin Prison's security ward 209 for one week until her release. Ms. Baniyaghoob has written a book entitled '*Women of Evin: Ward 209*' on her prison experience during this time. She has also published a second book entitled, '*Journalists in Iran*' which details the experiences of Iranian journalists with special focus on the situation of women.

On June 20, 2009, during a widespread crackdown on dissidents and journalists, plainclothes agents raided the home of Ms. Baniyaghoob and her husband Bahman Ahmadi Amouie at night and arrested both of them. Mr. Ahmadi Amouie is sentenced to five years in prison and has been imprisoned for majority of the time since his arrest. After two months of enduring lengthy interrogations and some time in solitary confinement, Ms. Baniyaghoob was released from prison.

In 2010, Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran sentenced Ms. Baniyaghoob to one year in prison and a 30-year ban from journalism activities. She was charged with "Propaganda against the regime" and "Insulting the President". According to [Amnesty International](#), in 2011 Ms. Baniyaghoob was further charged with "Having a personal blog without any authorization from government authorities".

In September 2012 Ms. Baniyaghoob was summoned to Evin Prison to begin serving her one-year sentence.

Ms. Baniyaghoob is the recipient of the 2009 Courage in Journalism prize by the International Women's Media Foundation and the 2010 Freedom of Speech Award by Reporters Without Borders. For more information follow the link: http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/07_13/07_01/070113_iran.htm

GENDER & HUMAN RIGHTS

Politics, Religion, Constitution - Women Want to Ensure their Rights in Tunisia

The revolution that ousted dictator Ben Ali in January 2011 brought new, hard-won freedom to the Tunisian people. However as the country discovers whether secularism and growing political Islam can co-exist, some women are enjoying greater liberty to practise their religion while others are concerned that their rights may be eroded.

“As Arabic, Muslim women, in Tunisia, we had a lot of advantages under the rule of the last two presidents, but since the revolution we are worried about our rights,” says Sinda Garziz, 22, human rights activist. “Things can change very fast but we will not give up what we already fought for.” Tunisian women enjoy far greater rights than many of their North African or Middle Eastern sisters, and this is the result not only of government policies

which promoted women’s equality and education but of a strong women’s rights movement which has a history dating back to the 1930s. When the Tunisian revolution began in late 2010, triggering the Arab Spring and making Tunisia the first country to overthrow its dictator, women stood alongside men at the protests. However since the moderate Islamic party Ennahda came to power in the elections of October 2011, and with the rise of radical Islamist groups in the country such as the Salafists,



many feminists from the political left are concerned about the growing Islamisation of the country. "My problem is linking politics with religion and creating a fusion between that which is spiritual and that which is political." "My problem is not with religion and the people who practise Islam. My problem is linking politics with religion and creating a fusion between that which is spiritual and that which is political. Tunisia is predominantly Muslim but there should not be religious parties at all," says Bisma Khalifaoui, a lawyer, women’s rights activist and widow of the political leader Chokri Belaid who was assassinated in February.

These concerns also go beyond the political level and into the social sphere. “Our concern about the Islamic movement in Tunisia is that they are trying to change people’s way of thinking. They go to poorer areas of Tunis (where there is higher unemployment and less education) and talk to men in the mosque telling them how they and their wives should behave at home. This is more dangerous than politics and it will be harder to change later,” says Garziz. As a result of these fears women activists have been closely monitoring the drafting of the new Tunisian constitution which is due to be finalised within the next couple of months. Last August they fiercely opposed one draft which suggested that women were ‘complementary’ to men; the wording was later changed to ‘equal’. “As women, we want to ensure that the constitution protects our rights as defined in Tunisia’s Personal Status code, that it adheres to international conventions and that it gives us our rights as individuals. We have been able to make modifications and that is reassuring but we still need to keep our eyes open,” says Radhia Jerbia, president of the National Union of Tunisian Women. Demonstrating its flexibility and willingness to listen to the opposition has been crucial for Ennahda, which strongly denies that it is trying to take away women’s freedom. “Some people are worried about losing their rights. But Ennahda wants a constitution that guarantees liberty. We want to keep society as it is,” says Assia Nafati, 27, member of the Ennahda party and the Constitutional assembly. Ennahda appointed Mehrezia Labidi-Maiza vice-president of the Constituent Assembly. Under the terms of the agreement for the transitional government, half of all deputies within the Assembly must be women, to ensure strong female presence and contribution. But also, post-revolution, Muslim women in Tunisia are enjoying greater freedom to practise their religion than before. The first president to rule Tunisia after independence, Habib Bourguiba, introduced many rights for women within a new Personal Status Code, but he was very critical of the headscarf and

famously called it “that odious rag”. Ben Ali, who succeeded Bourguiba following a coup d’etat, was fearful of a strong Islamic opposition and so also restricted Muslims’ freedom to practise their religion. Women were discouraged from wearing the hijab (a headscarf covering the hair) and the niqab (a headscarf and veil which reveals only the eyes). However since Ben Ali’s departure the number of women using the niqab and the hijab has increased. Salwa Hosni, 34, a housewife with two children, wore the niqab before and after the revolution. “Under Ben Ali’s rule I had many problems. The police would stop me when they saw me wearing the niqab and take me to the police station where I had to sign a document to say I wouldn’t wear it again. The Qur’an says that you should cover your head and I am very happy that today I can wear the niqab freely. Now I have liberty.” To read the entire article follow the link <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/06/spring-brings-differing-fruits-for-tunisian-women/>

Parliament spat endangers maternity law in Lebanon

Expectant mothers across the country could see their maternity leave extended to 70 days if Parliament approves the measure in a vote this week. But the long-sought amendment to Lebanon’s labor law could be held hostage to more delays if Parliament fails to convene.

New mothers in Lebanon can currently take up to seven weeks of paid maternity leave, far short of that recommended by the International Labour Organization. Mothers who work



in the public sector receive 60 days of leave. Some activists are optimistic the law will pass this final obstacle.

“I am eager as all future moms in Lebanon to have a decent and fair period of at least 10 weeks of maternity leave instead of the very unfair and insufficient 49 days that the labor law currently allows us to have,” said Rita Chemaly, a women’s rights activist.

Chemaly, who is herself seven months pregnant, said the 49 days allowed under the current law are not enough, with children requiring breastfeeding and having irregular sleep patterns. Parents whose families cannot help them take care of a newborn may need to pay more money for domestic help. “It is a must that a mother and her newborn take enough time after the delivery,” she said. Activists say the measure faces opposition from business owners concerned about the economic fallout of longer maternity leave.

In addition, even if the measure passes, it still falls short of international regulations.

The Maternity Protection Convention, which was approved in 2000, requires at least 14 weeks of maternity leave to new mothers, and the ILO recommends that the period be extended to 18 weeks. Lebanon has not ratified the convention. But activists say the 10 weeks are a first step toward broader rights. “The non-governmental organizations have accepted the 10 weeks as a first step in their lobbying campaign to amend the labor law,” said Chemaly. “A longer period at this time in Lebanon will make women’s position at the workplace precarious.” “We have to be realistic,” said Chantal Bou Akl, who worked with the National Commission for Lebanese Women on the draft amendment.

Bou Akl said women’s rights issues might gain more traction in Parliament if there were more female lawmakers, but added that the country also faced economic difficulties that

needed to be taken into consideration. Speaker Nabih Berri called for three back-to-back parliamentary sessions from Monday to Wednesday to discuss 45 draft laws, one of which is the maternity leave amendment, in the first sessions since the Parliament renewed its mandate and postponed elections until late next year. The sessions are in jeopardy over caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati's announcement that he will boycott them over constitutional concerns. Mikati, who stepped down in March, argues that Parliament can only meet to discuss urgent matters under a resigned government. But Bou Akl said politics should not derail important social causes. "We have to separate the humanitarian issues from politics in Lebanon," she said. The draft amendment was referred to Parliament by the Cabinet last year, and went through several parliamentary committees before being tabled before the general assembly. Fady Karam, the secretary-general of the NCLW, which drafted the amendments, said he sensed some opposition sparked by business owners. The debate is essentially one of "balancing rights and the job market," he said. Changes to the law might lead companies to hire men instead of women to avoid the economic cost of pregnancy on employers. Karam said the law had to clear many hurdles to reach the voting stage, passing through several parliamentary committees and legal hurdles as well as consultations with business owners on the economic consequences of extended maternity leave. The NCLW is headed by first lady Wafaa Sleiman. The amendments are part of a broader campaign by Sleiman, launched in 2011, to fight discrimination against women in the workplace. According to the ILO, Lebanon is second to in its length of maternity leave, edging only the United Arab Emirates, which offers 45 days. Bou Akl agrees that seven weeks of maternity leave is not enough. "The child still needs me," she said. "I want time with my kids, I want to develop a relationship with the child." To read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2013/Jul-01/222090-parliament-spat-endangers-maternity-law.ashx#ixzz2ZII26h00>

France- Government studies proposed Gender Equality Law

The French government on 3 July 2013 examined a sweeping gender equality overhaul, with a proposed new law on equal pay, paternity rights, domestic violence and sexism in the media.

.....The "men-women equality" law, presented to ministers today, seeks to change deeply-ingrained habits in a country where women do 80 per cent of household chores, are paid on average 27 per cent less than their male counterparts and occupy just 14 per cent of France's 36,000 mayoral posts.

Proposed measures include docking maternity leave from couples if

fathers fail to take proper leave too, enabling courts to accelerate restraining orders, trials and compulsory "awareness-raising courses" for violent male partners. The law also envisages providing females considered under threat of violence with free emergency mobile phones to alert police.

Divorced men who fail to pay alimony could see the owed funds taken directly from their social benefits.

Companies that fail to respect gender equality could be excluded from public contract tenders, while sports federations will also face penalties for shunning equality. Fines on



political parties failing to respect gender parity in legislative elections will be doubled. Currently only 26 per cent of [French](#) MPs are women.

The law also plans to create a special broadcast sexism watchdog, whose aim is to erase "degrading stereotypes" and ensure women are better represented across the board.

A key measure is to encourage more French men to take paternity leave.

Currently women are allowed to take six months leave after their first child and three years after their second. Under the new rules, a further six months will be granted after one child if taken by the father, while the three years will be reduced to two and a half unless the father takes the remaining six months.

The French government hopes to thus boost the number of men who take paternity leave each year from 18,000 to 100,000.

The law will also extend the definition of what constitutes "psychological violence" within a couple - a crime punishable by a three-year prison term - to include "behaviour and words" as well as "acts".

Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, France's women's rights minister, has likened the changes in sexual equality laws her government is introducing to granting women the vote and legalising abortion.

The self-professed land of human rights currently languishes in 57th place in the World Economic Forum's 2012 gender equality report - well behind Britain, in 18th place, but also Venezuela and the Kyrgyz Republic. It ranks almost last overall on the wage equality index - 129th out of 135 countries. For more information, click

http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/07_13/07_01/070113_france.htm

RESOURCES & CALLS

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Voice of Libyan Women Launches Women's Security Program

Following extensive research done on women's perceptions of security concerns and the impact of security on women's

participation in public life, The Voice of Libyan Women is proud to announce the launch of Noor: Shedding Light on Women's Security Concerns in Libya, noor.vlwlibya.org.



Noor, in its literal translation from Arabic means "light", and the symbolism of the word in Islam has long meant the enlightenment of an individual from darkness and ignorance, to a position of understanding and of wisdom.

It has been over two years that VLW has focused strongly on women's security, previously completing a national security assessment, that was the first and only of its kind in Libya, conducting interviews with key stakeholders, and organizing our "One Voice 2013: New

Horizons” conference which brought together over 30 Members of Parliament, International Ambassadors, Head of National Congress and over 150 local activists to address women’s role in the increasingly complex security situation in Libya. In addition to this we have conducted seminars and surveys in over 25 Libyan cities concentrating on domestic violence during our annual International. The results from the thousands of surveys completed by young Libyan girls resulted in Interim Libyan Prime Minister Dr. El Keib himself wearing a purple scarf and strongly condemning domestic violence and publicly stating his support for legislative change.

Through our assessment and research on women’s security concerns in Libya it became apparent that the most common justification for discrimination against women was the misunderstanding and misrepresentation of Islamic teachings, and their influence on Libyan cultural norms. Noor aims to shed light on the proper treatment of women in Islam through Ayas from the Holy Quran and Hadiths (narrations of the Prophet Mohammed Peace Be Upon Him). Noor focuses on women’s security- be it domestic violence, harassment or public slander - which make women feel vulnerable in public or leading roles, we felt it was of the greatest importance that all hadiths and citations used were authorized, allowing for Noor to have greater legitimacy in the eyes of the Libyan public, and allowing for the message to be heard - and valued - on a much wider scale.

Dar Al Ifta, which has continually been a great aide, particularly in the authentication and citation of all religious content used, expressed their support for the Noor Campaign, “*we commend your efforts ...we wish you all success*”, they stated. (Link to PDF letter from Dar Al Ifta in Arabic). Noor currently includes thirty three billboards throughout over twenty Libyan cities in addition to television and radio commercials that will be playing on both local and national stations. Please join us as VLW will also be utilizing social media with #NoorLibya once the campaign officially launches this Friday, 5th of July.

We deliberately chose the holy day of Friday, only days leading to the holy month of Ramadan, to launch the campaign, as it is a time which we believe the message is strengthened. In the Autumn VLW will begin seminars aimed at addressing women’s security issues throughout Libyan workplaces, schools, universities and Masjids targeting audiences of both men and women, young and old. It has been a great pleasure for us to see this project come to light - the very foundation for The Voice of Libyan Women has been a platform for sustainable, authentic and indigenous Libyan progress. We take great pride in addressing women’s security in a way which will be heard and respected. It is time that the power of religion is used as it was meant to be, as a tool of education and illumination rather than as an excuse for ignorance and prevalent cultural norms and that we ensure that women are treated as partners in the rebuilding of the new Libya. To know more about the campaign follow the link <http://www.vlwl Libya.org/en/>

BOOKS & REPORTS

Women Smallholders - Integration Into Markets for Less Poverty & Hunger

In a new report, FAO is calling for more nuanced policy-making to boost smallholder farm output, requiring better knowledge of individual farm households and the constraints they face, to be able to target investments and policy support where they are needed to ensure that they can sell surpluses from their harvests.

“Smallholder farmers need to be better integrated into markets in order to reduce hunger and poverty,” said David Hallam, Director of FAO’s Trade and Markets Division. Only with greater



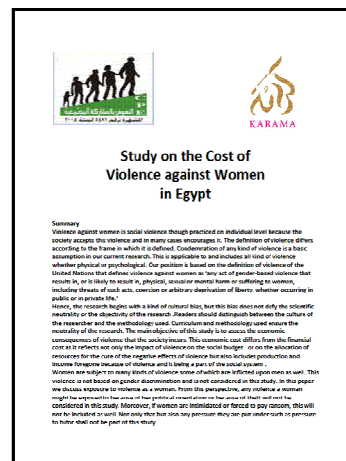
market integration and more inclusive value chains will they adopt the new technologies required to achieve productivity growth. Direct Link to Full 50-Page FAO Report: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3292e/i3292e.pdf>

Study on the cost of Violence against women in Egypt

Society accepts violence conducted at the individual level, and in many cases encourages it, thus contributing to it. This study widely condemns all kinds of violence, including psychological violence, and works with the definition of violence as set forth by the United Nations, which regards violence against women as “...Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”

This study depends on quantitative measurement of incidents of violence and their impact on women’s lives. In spite of the researchers’ acknowledgement of the psychological impact of violence on women, this study does not tackle psychological effects in isolation but handles them in connection to how they interfere with women’s productivity and participation in society. In other words, the psychological impact is discussed implicitly in relation to women’s productivity (in the short run and long run) and how much is foregone because of exposure to violence as a female member of society. Direct Link to Full 82-Page 2012 Report:

<http://www.el-karama.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/CostofViolenceStudy.pdf>



Paper: The Sexual and Reproductive Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities

Sexual and reproductive rights are fundamental human rights. They embrace human rights that are already recognised in international, regional and national legal frameworks, standards and agreements. [i][i]

They include the right to autonomy and self-determination - the right of everyone to make free and informed decisions and have full control over their body, sexuality, health, relationships, and if, when and with whom to partner, marry and have children - without any form of discrimination, stigma, coercion or violence. This includes the right of everyone to enjoy and express their sexuality, be free from interference in making personal decisions about sexuality and reproductive matters, and to access sexual and reproductive health information, education, services and support. It also includes the right to be free from torture and from cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment; and to be free from violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect. [ii][ii]

However, women and girls with disabilities throughout the world have failed to be afforded, or benefit from, these provisions in international, regional and national legal frameworks, standards and agreements. Instead, systemic prejudice and discrimination against them continues to result in multiple and extreme violations of their sexual and reproductive



The Sexual and Reproductive Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities

rights, through practices such as forced and/or coerced sterilisation, forced contraception and/or limited or no contraceptive choices, a focus on menstrual and sexual suppression, poorly managed pregnancy and birth, forced or coerced abortion, termination of parental rights, denial of/ or forced marriage, and other forms of torture and violence, including gender-based violence. They also experience systemic exclusion from sexual and reproductive health care services. These practices and violations are framed within traditional social attitudes and entrenched disability-based and gender-based stereotypes that continue to characterise disability as a personal tragedy, a burden and/or a matter for medical management and rehabilitation. [iii][iii]

This Briefing Paper examines the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls with disabilities in the context of the future development agenda Beyond 2014 and Post 2015. It deliberately focuses on women and girls with disabilities in recognition that they are generally more likely to experience infringements of their sexual and reproductive rights given the physiology of human reproduction and the gendered social, legal and economic context in which sexuality, fertility, pregnancy and parenthood occur. [iv][iv] This Paper examines some of the key sexual and reproductive rights violations experienced by women and girls with disabilities around the world. It includes a discussion of intersectionality and multiple identity, recognising that this reality is important to any examination of the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls with disabilities. It provides an analysis of the cycle of accountability in relation to the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls with disabilities, looking at the dimensions of responsibility, answerability and enforceability. It poses some key priority considerations for ensuring the future development agenda Beyond 2014 and Post 2015 is inclusive of, and responsive to, women and girls with disabilities all over world. Importantly, as opposed to 'needs', this paper speaks to the sexual and reproductive *rights* of women and girls with disabilities - rights that for far too long have been violated, denied, ignored and trivialised by those in positions to make a difference. Direct link to the paper: http://www.womenenabled.org/pdfs/issues_paper_srr_women_and_girls_with_disabilities_final2013.doc

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