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MENA GAD EBRIEF / Issue 155 - April 2015

NEWS & ARTICLES GENDER ACTIVISM

Rural women in Tunisia: "We have been silent for too long"



The Amal advocacy campaign, launched in Azmour last December, aims to empower women at every level of Tunisian society

Tired of the challenges they face going unnoticed, growing numbers of Tunisian women are supporting a scheme designed to uphold their rights.

Growing up in a village in north-eastern Tunisia, Ahlam Ben Ahmad had to walk up to 4km to reach a hospital, buy food or attend school. She often got sick from the long journey, and dropped out of school two years before graduation because of her long commute. "I woke up at 5am every day, carried my sick brother on my back and walked to school to reach it by seven," she says. "But I still carried my brother there every day because at least one of us nine had to finish school."

Fifteen years after Ben Ahmad, now 30, dropped out of school, the government has not improved the roads near her home. It still takes her several hours to travel from her hometown of Boucha to Kelibia, the nearest city. In a private vehicle, the same journey would take just 30 minutes. Like Ben Ahmad, many women in rural Tunisia face long trips to access essential services, which are usually located in urban centres.

Read more:

http://www.theguardian.com/globaldevelopment/2015/mar/30/rural-women-rights-tunisiaworld-social-forum

Lebanese domestic workers to unionize



In their fight against abuse and violence, around 200 foreign female domestic workers launched the first domestic workers union of Lebanon, with the help of the Federation of Trade Unions of Workers and Employees Union (FENASOL), an organization that has worked with foreign domestic employees for the past four years to make the government consider their rights. The union is the first of its kind in the Middle East and North Africa, but was still not recognized by the Ministry of Labor two months after its official creation.

The women who pushed for the founding of the domestic workers union can be found outside Beirut. In the gym of the College des Freres Unis school in Salouni, on March 15, well-dressed Sri Lankan women set up their annual Sri Lanka Women Society's Day. Mala, a domestic worker who has been in Lebanon for 33 years, is the organizer of the event, which has today a different feel.

"I'm the vice president of the new workers union and today we celebrate its creation, in addition to our special women's day," she told Al-Monitor. "With the syndicate, we can now reach more girls and help ourselves.

Read more:

http://www.almonitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/lebanondomestic-workers-union-rights-fenasol-ilokafala.html?utm_source=Al-Monitor+Newsletter+%5BEnglish%5D&utm_campaign=17 33069c0d-March 26 2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_28264 b27a0-1733069c0d-102417357#ixzz3XJUsfjzk

Women face setbacks in new Libya



Libyans celebrate in Tripoli's landmark Martyrs Square on Feb. 17, 2015, the upcoming fourth anniversary of the Libyan revolution, which toppled strongman Moammar Gadhafi.

On June 25, right after she cast her vote for the Council of Representatives, Salwa new home Bugaighis was murdered at her in Benghazi in eastern Libya. She was Libya's most prominent female lawyer, a member of the former National Transitional Council (NTC) that led the rebel movement in 2011 and wellknown civil activist. In February, Libya was shocked again by news of murder targeting yet another well-known activist in Tripoli: Intissar al-Hasaari and her aunt were killed at a busy road west of Tripoli's city center.

Those two cases made headlines inside and outside the country, because the victims were well-known public activists. However, many more violent crimes against women go unreported. So far, not a single murder case has been thoroughly investigated, let alone solved and the killers brought to justice.

Since NATO helped rebels topple the regime of Moammar Gadhafi, women in the new Libya have suffered ironically at the hands of those who claim to have liberated them, most of whom became militias involved in crime.

Read more:

http://www.al-

monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/libya-womenmurder-situation-gaddafi-regimemilitias.html?utm_source=Al-Monitor+Newsletter+%5BEnglish%5D&utm_campaign=5c d77ed277-March 24 2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_28264 b27a0-5cd77ed277-102417357#ixzz3XJVKLITv

Egyptian woman who has lived as man for 40 years voted 'best mum'



Egypt's president, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, hands Sisa Abu Daooh the motherhood award

Sisa Abu Daooh took on male identity after her husband's death in order to find employment to support her daughter

Sisa Abu Daooh is Egypt's matriarch of the moment, after being named by officials in her home town of Luxor as the city's most supportive mother. Which may come as a surprise: for she is Luxor's "best mum" by virtue of having worked and dressed for more than 40 years as a man.

Abu Daooh, 65, met Egypt's president, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, on Sunday to receive an award. She said she was not going to stop living as a man. "I have decided to die in these clothes. I've got used to it. It's my whole life and I can't leave it now."

It was a life she began in the 1970s when her husband died. She was six months pregnant with their first child. These days, at least one in seven Egyptian breadwinners is a woman, but 40 years ago, her conservative family did not consider it appropriate for her to work.

"My brothers wanted me to get married again," she says. "All the time they kept bringing new grooms to me."

Read more:

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http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/22/egyptianwoman-award-lived-as-man

School plan to change gender stereotypes causes storm in Italy



A plan to challenge young children's ideas about gender through play at schools in northern Italy – including with a memory game that contains images of male homemakers and female plumbers – has created a storm of protest, with some politicians saying the effort will confuse children about their sexual identity.

The programme – titled Game of Respect – is aimed at children aged three to six in 45 schools in the Trieste region and involves educating teachers about how to use games and roleplaying to teach gender equality.

Part of the kit given to teachers is Memory, the classic matching game, which includes images of male teachers, female chefs, female firefighters and a man pushing a pram.

Another game uses images of an elephant – on a skateboard, with a briefcase, with children, cooking – to promote questions and dialogue with children about whether they believe it is a male or female elephant that is engaged in the activity. The programme urges teachers to observe the use of certain colours in the classroom that are traditionally geared in a gender-specific way, and how many toys are used – such as strollers and cosmetics – that also adhere to gender stereotypes.

Read more:

http://www.france24.com/en/20150309-un-59thsession-commission-beijing-20-status-women-rights-newyork/

Syrian radio station examines role of women in war



The team of Radio Souriat is seen with station director Amira Malek kneeling (in blue blouse) in the middle of the announcers of the daily programs.

"Prevention, protection, participation" are the three basic concepts behind the "Our Right, Which We Must Demand" promotional campaign Radio Souriat started Feb. 22 to raise awareness about UN Resolution 1325 and to demand the implementation of its provisions as one of the important tools for gender equality during and after wars.

This campaign, the first of its kind in Syria, is especially important considering the political and military circumstances in the country. Campaign organizers thought that now was the best time to implement the provisions of the resolution, which was endorsed by Syria but never implemented following its adoption by the UN Security Council. According to one of the most important provisions, the peacekeeping forces, the police and the judicial authority should guarantee women's protection. The forces should also commit to women's and girls' rights.

Read more:

http://www.almonitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/04/syria-radioempower-women-role-war.html#ixzz3XJBxwzBG

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

You deserve rape, Quran teacher tells children in Turkish school



Parents are demanding that a teacher of religion classes in northern Turkey be fired after he told some of his female students that they "deserve rape" for not wearing an Islamic headscarf.

"You don't cover your head anyway, so raping you or doing evil to you is permissible [in Islam]," the female teacher, identified by the initials L.Y.İ., told students at the Halil Rıfat Paşa Middle School in the province of Tokat on March 9, according to parents who spoke to Doğan News Agency.

The teacher was reportedly angered by noise caused by mixed male and female students in an elective class on the Quran, during which 17 seventh graders were talking to each other instead of listening to the teacher.

According to the parents, the teacher also told the girls that they should have prayed for Özgecan Aslan - whose brutal murder in southern Turkey on Feb. 13 caused national outrage - instead of going to demonstrations to commemorate her.

Read more:

http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/you-deserve-rapequran-teacher-tells-children-in-turkishschool.aspx?PageID=238&NID=79543&NewsCatID=341

Women from Sierra Leone "sold like slaves" into domestic work in Kuwait



A domestic worker in the Avenues shopping mall in Kuwait City. The country has the highest ratio of domestic workers to citizens in the Middle East.

In the basement of an old tower block near Kuwait City, recruitment agents brandish files full of healthy, work-ready domestic workers. "Choose the one you want," says one agent with a smile. "I will give you a hundred days' guarantee. If you don't like her you can send her back."

In Kuwait the domestic workers business is booming, with nearly 90% of Kuwaiti households employing at least one foreign maid. Yet while dozens of recruitment agencies are pulling out the stops to attract potential employers – including parading women in front of potential employers who can take them home on the spot – they are also being accused of selling women and duping them into a life of domestic servitude.

Women from Sierra Leone formerly employed as domestic workers in private Kuwaiti households said they had been "sold like slaves" by recruitment agents to families in the Kuwaiti capital and then resold multiple times.

Read more:

http://www.theguardian.com/globaldevelopment/2015/apr/02/women-sierra-leone-soldlike-slaves-domestic-work-kuwait

ISIS releases more than 200 Yazidis



Over 200 Yazidi captives were released by ISIS in Iraq's Kirkuk province

ISIS on Wednesday released more than 200 Yazidis, a minority group whose members were killed, captured and displaced when the Islamist terror organization overtook their towns in northern Iraq last summer, officials said.

Most of those released were women and children; the rest were ill or elderly, said Rassol Omar, a commander in the Peshmerga force that defends northern Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish region.

Omar didn't say what led to the release, other than asserting that Arab tribal leaders helped to coordinate it.

The freed Yazidis were received by Peshmerga, who sent them to the Kurdish regional capital, Irbil, said Nuri Osman, an official with Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government. It wasn't immediately clear what motivated Wednesday's release, Osman said.

Osman said 217 Yazidis were released. Omar, the Peshmerga commander, had a higher count: 228.

Read more:

http://edition.cnn.com/2015/04/08/world/isis-yazidis-released/

Women up in Arms: Zapatistas and Rojava Kurds Embrace a New Gender Politics

"Some resistance movements are creating new gender relations as a primary part of their struggle and process for building a better world.



Resistance and strength manifest like weeds through cracks in Chiapas, Mexico and transnational Kurdistan where the respective Zapatista and Kurdish resistance movements are creating new gender relations as a primary part of their struggle and process for building a better world. In both places, women's participation in the armed forces has been an entry-point for a new social construction of gender relations based on equity.

While the Kurds have been fighting for their survival against ISIS in the Syrian/Turkish border town of Kobane, the Zapatistas put down their arms over 20 years ago and have maintained a non-violent struggle since. In both cases, women have fought alongside men against their own collective obliteration while making radical changes in their gender relations. Working towards more equity makes possible more direct democracy in building greater autonomy from the state.[1] In both efforts, there is also a deep connection to the land[2] that regards the value of women and the environment as essential to life itself.

Read more:

http://www.wluml.org/news/women-arms-zapatistasand-rojava-kurds-embrace-new-gender-politics

Why Young Western Women Go To Syria



A Swedish woman who joined Islamic State (IS) and is now living in Raqqa with her children has offered some insights into why some Western Muslim women are joining the extremist group, tweeting that she feels protected living under "the law of Allah" in Syria and that life is better for Muslim women under Islamic State rule.

"They ask why we leave? We women are harassed and some beaten in the street in the west. Here under the law of Allah we are protected," the woman, who goes under the name Muhajira Umm Hamza, tweeted on March 17.

"I cover myself. I don't hide. I am free and not oppressed," Umm Hamza tweeted on March 8.

Umm Hamza describes herself on her Twitter account as a "Muslima [Muslim woman] with kids and we left sweden [sic] to live in khilafa ["caliphate," the term used by IS to describe the lands under its control].

Read more:

http://www.rferl.org/content/why-young-women-go-tosyria/26906089.html

GENDER & HUMAN RIGHTS

German Court Says Muslim Teachers Can Wear Headscarf unless Disruptive



Germany's top court said Friday that Muslim teachers can wear the Islamic headscarf in class as long as it doesn't disrupt school activities, in a ruling likely to revive emotional debate. The Constitutional Court said Muslim teachers in state schools could no longer face a blanket ban on the headscarf, effectively revising its 2003 decision that left the door open to it being barred.

Judges at the Karlsruhe-based court in southwest Germany said a ban could only be justified if the wearing of the Islamic headscarf led to a "sufficiently concrete danger" of disruption in the school, or of "state neutrality".

The ruling is likely to re-launch a longstanding debate in a country with around four million Muslims amid recent divisive protests against the supposed "Islamisation" of Europe. Since 2003 several of Germany's 16 regional states, which are responsible for education, have banned teachers wearing the Muslim headscarf following the top court's initial ruling.

The Constitutional Court had said it was up to each state to write its own laws on the issue.

Read more:

http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/171346-germancourt-says-muslim-teachers-can-wear-headscarf-unlessdisruptive

Iran Will Allow Women in Sports Stadiums, Reversing a Much-Criticized Rule

In a major shift, Iran announced Saturday that women would be allowed to attend big sporting events, reversing a rule that had barred them from entering stadiums to watch matches attended by men.

The announcement, following criticism from international sport federations and protests by Iranian women and women's rights activists, appeared to have been timed to coincide with the news of a break through in the negotiations over Iran's nuclear program.

A Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports official told the state-run Islamic Republic News Agency that women and their families would be allowed to attend most athletic events, except for those of "masculine" sports, like wrestling or swimming, during which male athletes wear uniforms or suits that cover little of their bodies.

Women will most likely be assigned to special sections in the stadiums, while mixed seating will be available for families.

The official, Abdolhamid Ahmad, the deputy sports minister, called for a new atmosphere in stadiums, which many Iranians consider too rowdy and "not Islamic enough" for women. "Stadiums must become family-oriented, and the atmosphere there must be softened," Mr. Ahmad said. He added that there were some sports that women were not interested in, "nor is their attendance possible, because these sports are for men." He did not say which sports he meant.

Read more:

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/05/world/middleeast /iran-will-allow-women-in-sports-stadiums-reversing-amuch-criticized-rule.html?smid=tw-share& r=1

Iran to appoint first female ambassador since the Islamic revolution



Afkham is a veteran of Iran's diplomatic apparatus, having served there for around 30 years as a ministerial aide and later as head of its public relations department.

Iran is set to appoint its first female ambassador since the 1979 Islamic revolution, marking a breakthrough for women in government under the moderate president, Hassan Rouhani.

Marzieh Afkham, who is the country's first foreign ministry spokeswoman, is to head a mission in east Asia, the state news agency reported. It was not clear to which country she will be posted as her appointment is yet to be announced officially.

Afkham will only be the second female ambassador Iran has ever had. Under the late Shah's rule, Mehrangiz Dolatshahi, a three-time member of the parliament famous for her advocacy of family protection law, became an ambassador to Denmark in 1976, a post she held until the revolution.

Women in Iran need the permission of their husband or legal custodian, such as their father, to be able to travel abroad. The government is also reluctant to promote women who are single and not married. Afkham was reported to have married last year.

Read more:

http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/14/iranmarzieh-afkham-first-female-ambassador-since-islamicrevolution

Education Ministry to open nurseries at girls' schools



Teachers have welcomed the decision by Education Minister Azzam Al-Dakhil to open nurseries at all government and private girls' schools across the Kingdom.

The ministry wants to increase the productivity of women teachers and put their minds at ease concerning the safety of their children during working hours, the minister said on his Twitter account recently.

"We desperately want to boost the productivity of women teachers while assuring them that their children are safe ... I just issued a decision to open nurseries at all government, private and foreign girls' schools in the Kingdom." Many working women in the Kingdom have expressed concern about the safety of their children after several incidents involving foreign housemaids killing youngsters.

Latifa Abdulmohsin, a teacher, said the decision was long overdue and hoped it would be implemented soon. However, she said many school buildings lack the infrastructure for safe and healthy areas for their children.

"Taking my kids to school will help me do my work. The decision will reduce the number of days that women take off to care for their children," she was quoted as saying in a local publication recently. The Egyptian Center for women's rights ECWR welcomes the court ruling confirming mother's right in issuing birth certificates for her children

The Administrative Court in Alexandria ruled confirming the right of Egyptian mother to issue the birth certificates for her children. ECWR welcomes this step as a new guarantee for the Egyptian mothers, a victory for their rights and a reflection of the 2014 Constitution, which obliged the state to maintain maternity and childhood rights.

A mother filed a report when her husband approached the Health Bureau to inform them of not registering his female newly born child without his presence or the presence of his brother because of some matrimonial disputes between the father and his wife. The wife then resorted to the police department filing this report. The court ruled supporting the mother's right to issue the birth certificate so that the child is not deprived from the right to have a legal personality as a result of some matrimonial disputes.

This court ruling is considered to be the result of the efforts of civil society organizations supporting women's rights as they consistently demand women's access to their rights which already exist in the constitution.

Read more:

http://ecwronline.org/?p=6611

Read more:

http://www.arabnews.com/saudi-arabia/news/723421

Divorce in Gaza comes at steep price



Palestinian woman celebrates beside brides during a mass wedding for 250 couples in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, Dec. 19, 2012

Three years ago, Samira Jamil reached a dead end. She had no choice but to divorce her husband by khula, whereby a wife financially compensates her husband.

Jamil, whose name has been changed for this article, told Al-Monitor that the main reason behind the divorce was financial: Her husband was stingy. "Stinginess was among the most important reasons for divorce by khula. The list, however, goes on and includes the nonfulfillment of marital duties and financial exploitation," she said.

Lebanese-born Jamil, 52, said that the divorce process took a month and a half. She ceded all her financial rights. "Although I am fragile by nature, oppression strengthened my character. This is why I filed for divorce by khula before the courts. For the process to be quickly completed, I ceded my deferred dowry and the house's furniture," Jamil said. "I was ready to give up everything in exchange for divorce."

Read more:

http://www.al-

monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/04/gaza-divorcesharia-courts-khul-wealthy-women.html#ixzz3XTQ0JUSb

RESOURCES & CALLS BOOKS & REPORTS

The Global Wage Report 2014/15



The 2014/15 edition examines the link between wages and inequality at the household level. It shows that wages constitute the largest single source of income for households with at least one member of working age in most countries and points to changes in wages and paid employment as key factors underlying recent trends in inequality. The report also considers wage gaps between certain groups, such as those between women and men, migrants and nationals, and workers in the informal and formal economy.

Inequality can be addressed through policies that affect wage distribution directly or indirectly, as well as through fiscal redistribution. However, increasing inequality in the labour market places a heavier burden on efforts to reduce inequality through taxes and transfers.

For a direct link:

http://www.rightingfinance.org/wpcontent/uploads/2013/06/Download-full-Glossary.pdf

Women, Business, and the Law 2014 : Removing Restrictions to Enhance Gender Equality

In the past 50 years women's legal status has improved all over the world. But many laws still make it difficult for women to fully participate in economic life whether by getting jobs or starting businesses. Discriminatory rules bar women from certain jobs, restrict access to capital for women-owned firms and limit women's capacity to make legal decisions.

Gender differences in laws affect both developing and developed economies, and women in all regions. Women, business, and the law measures restrictions on women s employment and entrepreneurship as well as incentives for women s employment in 143 economies.

Women, business, and the law and the World Bank's global financial inclusion global findings database show that in economies with a default full community of property regime, there are on average 10 percentage points more female owned accounts at formal financial institutions than in economies with a default separation of property regime.

This report has shown that although much progress has been made in recent decades in gradually dismantling many of the legal restrictions which have hampered women from more fully contributing to national prosperity, there is a large unfinished agenda of reform.

Read more:

https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/ 10986/20528

For a direct link:

https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle /10986/20528/922710PUB0v20W00Box385355B00PUB LIC0.pdf?sequence=1

Women's Economic Roles And The Development Paradigm

Gender Action invites you to celebrate Women's History Month with a book chapter on the economic history of the women's movement called "Women's Economic Roles and the Development Paradigm".

The social construction of gender reflected in development theory was increasingly challenged by women in both developed and developing countries. Scholars documented the work that women did and concluded that many development programs were having an adverse impact on women.

As the women's movement grew, women demanded greater emphasis on their rights. Rapid socio-economic transitions altered family structure which called for greater attention to gender relationships.

Gender sensitive programs and policies further changed development programs. Activists today are working to ensure that rhetoric is matched with expenditures and with greater political power and representation for women.

This chapter traces the evolution of the development paradigm in response to the recognition of women's economic roles. It charts the shifts in thinking and in action, and relates them to developments in scholarly research, to activism in developing and developed countries, and to global fora which helped change the paradigm.

Read more:

http://www.awid.org/News-Analysis/New-Resources2/Women-s-Economic-Roles-and-the-Development-Paradigm

For a direct link:

http://genderaction.org/docs/Tinker Zuckerman Women s %20Roles Chapter.pdf

Women and the Future of Work: Beijing+20 and Beyond

Despite significant progress since the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, women continue to experience widespread discrimination and inequality in the workplace. Twenty years later, and as we approach the ILO's centenary in 2019, the ILO has launched the Women at Work initiative alongside the Future of Work initiative, to place a spotlight on gender and drill down into some of the most crucial areas.

The future of work means more women at work, and this future must deliver on gender equality.

For a direct link:

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/--dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_348087.pdf



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