



The Middle East & North Africa
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NEWS & ARTICLES

GENDER ACTIVISM

Day 9/16 of Activism Against Gender Violence: 'But This Is Our Lives...

In today's narrative we salute the women who face the pain of gender-based violence with dignity and hope for the future. Here we take a look at the stories of women who may not be women's rights activists in the traditional sense. Yet, in their own understated way, are they not survivors and fighters? We invite you to read about these resilient women and take a moment to think just how we should define activism against gender violence.

Palestine : As I sat next to Fatima, a woman in her late 40s from a small village near Nablus in the West Bank, Palestine, I wondered how daily violence had become her accepted reality. I was delivering a sexual and reproductive health workshop with a small team of female doctors and nurses from the local area to about 20 women of various ages, and we were also hoping to find out more about the levels of gender-based violence amongst the community. As we are all well aware, the data on gender-based violence is unreliable and we had heard that honour killings were on the rise. One UN report suggested over 60 per cent of women in the West Bank were being beaten regularly in their homes, and in 2002 there were 31 cases of women reportedly murdered in the home ...In the end, the statistics didn't really matter. What was clear from those women sitting around me, their children hanging from their necks and on the edges of their dresses was '*hay hayatna*' - this is our life.

Most of the women in the room were subjected to early marriage, and we were hoping to at least raise their levels of awareness around the dangers of this practice. That just because it happened to them didn't mean it had to continue, and that the Palestine Authority had set the legal age of marriage at 18 years. I felt kind of helpless with all these facts in my head knowing I had no way of assuring the protection of these women if they risked doing something different. Fatima must have seen the sadness in my eyes; the disbelief that any woman should accept violence as a normal part of her life. 'Don't look so worried *habibtī*,' she said. 'I may not be able to escape my husband, but I can teach my daughter. I can help her to understand that this does not have to be her life. And she will go to school. Everything I do, I do for her, so she will not be like me. She will not have my life.'

Libya 'You should give the women guns. Then WE will get rid of Gaddafi and stop his dirty soldiers from doing what they are doing to us!'

Khadija must have been about 80 years old. Her front teeth were missing and when she laughed, her whole body shook so hard all of us in the tent could not help but laugh with



her...even though it was black humour at its best. We were a small group of women who had gathered together inside one of the refugee tents on the border between Libya and Tunisia, to sip tea and discuss the health needs of the women and children in the camp. But I soon realised that these women needed to voice their fury and pain at the violence they were subjected to.

There have been numerous conflicting reports about the incidents of rape by the military during the uprising in Libya in 2011. The case of Iman al-Obeidi was one of the few to reach the international media, and drew attention to the fact that yet again, this conflict was being played out on the bodies and souls of women. Hundreds of women protestors took to the streets in Benghazi to highlight Iman's plight, shouting, "Iman, you are not alone" and "You are a symbol of our courage and freedom."

Iman was one of many, Khadija told me. And many of these women did not report the sexual abuse, nor did they tell their families. I looked down at my tea and shook my head, "We need more women like Iman," I said. And then I felt Khadija's hand press against mine. She had calmed down somewhat from her initial fiery speech about guns.

"We are not all leaders my dear. We are not all big fighters like Iman," she said. "But we will stand by Iman - some of us quietly, some of us with our hands in the air, screaming so our pain does not stay in our hearts and make us black inside."

The stories of Fatima and Khadija are just two of many I collected in my time in the Middle East - the women of Erbil that bore so much of the violence after the Iraq war; the girls of Yemen who face so much pain from birth to death because they are married so young. One thing I realised is that I once felt that these women had limited, if any, choices. That it was up to "the big fighters" to make the hard choices, so that all women could have lives that do not involve 'accepted' violence and pain. But then I realised I was wrong...

I applaud the amazing women activists all over the world who are fighting every day to see that this type of violence does not continue. Some we know so well through their writing or their media profiles, others from their campaigns. Today, however, I want to dedicate this to all the women who may not be women's rights leaders; may not have gone out and fought in the street; but have the courage to get up and face the day knowing that they can have an impact; that they can change the world quietly and deliberately by having the strength to raise their children differently.

I want them to know that in what they see as the ordinariness of their actions, they are extraordinary. *Mariem Omari is WLUML's Deputy Director and a committed advocate of women's rights.* To read more about the campaign follow the link

<http://www.wluml.org/news/day-916-activism-against-gender-violence-our-lives>

Bahrain: Interview with Maryam al-Khawaja "The Regime Oppresses All Bahrainis"

In conversation with Azzurra Meringolo, the head of the "Bahrain Center for Human Rights" Maryam al-Khawaja reports on the repression of activists within the Bahrain democracy movement and how the regime is trying to portray the protests as a conflict between ethnic or confessional groups. Read more <http://www.wluml.org/news/bahrain-interview-maryam-al-khawaja-regime-oppresses-all-bahrainis>

Women On Every UAE Board, Rules Cabinet

The UAE Cabinet made it compulsory for corporations and government agencies to include women on their boards of directors.

The historic decision was announced on Twitter by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Vice President of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai.

"Women proved themselves in many workplaces and today we want them to have a strong presence in decision-making positions in our institutions," Sheikh Mohammed tweeted.

Very few nations have implemented such far-reaching regulations to ensure women are represented on boards of directors.

Norway became the first country to introduce board gender quotas in 2003. There, if a board has more than nine directors, each gender must be represented by at least 40 per cent of directors. In Europe, Italy, France, Belgium, Spain and Iceland have also introduced quotas.

Elsewhere, Malaysia last year announced it would be compulsory from 2016 for women to have 30 per cent representation in decision-making positions.

India has proposed to make it mandatory for companies with five or more independent directors to have at least one woman director.

The Dubai Women Establishment (DWE) held a conference last month on the topic, discussing how to increase female representation on boards; women hold only 1.5 per cent of board positions in listed companies in the GCC.

Shamsa Saleh, the DWE chief executive, said the Cabinet decision was "the most important news in the history of Dubai Women Establishment".

"We recommended this policy last month in our forum and it's been implemented this month," she said.

"It means that we have succeeded and Sheikh Mohammed is very happy about it."

Details of the new policy were not immediately available, but Ms Saleh said it is likely to recommend a ratio of women. The timing of Sheikh Mohammed's announcement was a surprise to her, so she did not know which parts of the policy the Cabinet had approved, she added.

"But the announcement of the policy itself, it's an achievement for women in the UAE," she said. "It's an achievement in the history of women. Most of the countries in the world do not implement this - just a few countries. And we are one of the few countries."

Maha Al Mansouri, the associate director of human resources, at [Masdar](#), also said she was surprised by the news but "really excited" to hear about the decision.

"This recognises women's efforts and helps involve them in the decision-making process," she said. "It will also help increase competition between the two genders."

The decision was made at a Cabinet meeting to approve a draft law on small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

As well as tweeting about women's representation on company boards, Sheikh Mohammed also used the social media tool to outline various other components of the new law.

He said it included the establishment of a SME council and the provision of incentives in several areas to business owners. He did not say what these were.

The law also aims to "prepare a new generation of financially independent Emirati businessmen so they can contribute to our economy," he tweeted.

Addressing the young people of the UAE, he said he held big ambitions for them.



"Your small businesses will grow and you will be the future leaders of the private sector," he wrote. For more information follow the link

<http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/industry-insights/economics/wo...>

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Desperate Syrian Refugees Sell Daughters to Wealthy Libyan Men

Some Syrian refugees, fleeing the devastation in their home country after more than 18 months of a brutal government crackdown against rebels, are being forced to sell off their daughters, especially to wealthy Libyans, for much-needed cash. Some Syrian refugees are being forced to sell off their daughters in Libya.

According to a report from BBC, some Libyans have even asked Syrian refugees in the country for underage girls as potential brides. Hundreds of Syrians have fled to the Libyan city of Benghazi, almost 1,000 miles from Damascus, and many are desperate to raise money to survive. Their Syrian daughters -- renowned for their beauty -- have become a valuable asset.



"We arrived in Benghazi two months ago, and last month a Libyan man knocked at my door and asked whether I had a daughter or a sister to marry in return for money," Ahmed Atrash, a Syrian refugee now working as a carpenter in Libya, told the BBC. "I laughed and told him yes, I do have a two-year-old daughter.

"[The Libyan man] became angry, then I told him, 'Fear God! We sought refuge and protection in your country not to be humiliated,'" Atrash added. "[Libyans] are exploiting our financial distress. Many families here cannot provide even a square meal for their children." However, a Muslim cleric defends such marriages between wealthy Libyans and desperate Syrians.

"There is nothing wrong in such marriages if the men are financially able, whether they are single or married," said Sheikh Ashraf Al-Aqrabi, imam of the Garyounis Mosque in Libya.

"This is a religious duty as long as it is done by mutual consent. We must encourage Libyans to help protect such vulnerable families, because they might be forced into prostitution."

Atrash counters that these marriages amount to "modern-day slavery."

"If they were really honest, they would come along with their mothers and fathers, not on their own," he added. "This is not a decent way to propose to respectable families in all Muslim societies. Syrian women escaped from rapes by Bashar al-Assad's thugs to face rapes in the name of religion."

BBC stated that the dowry for a Syrian woman only amounts to a few hundred dollars, while a prospective Libyan bride would demand as much as \$19,000.

Radio Netherlands Worldwide, or RNW, reported that some Libyan agencies are facilitating arranged marriages between Libyan men and Syrian refugee girls. Applicants have to pay a registration fee of about \$390 and are then asked what kind of woman they are looking for and details of their financial status.

RNW also noted that Arab media and Facebook have engaged in lively debates over the issue of Syrian girls being forced to wed.

“People do not talk about anything else these days but about Syrian girls you could marry for one or two hundred pounds.” a Jordanian columnist named Maher Abu Tayer said, according to RNW.

Yanar Mohammed, a women's rights activist from Iraq, lamented the whole situation. “A man in any society would not refuse a girl who is presented to him on a silver platter,” she said. “Especially when it is said to be a national or religious duty to marry her to save her honor, he will seize that opportunity.”

The Syrian Revolutionary Union in Benghazi estimates that about 1,000 Syrian refugees are now residing in the city, although Libya has no formal organization in place to properly host the Syrians. At least a quarter of a million Syrians have fled the country since the outbreak of the revolt against Assad; however, the bulk of them have relocated to Turkey and Jordan. Read more http://www.wunrn.com/news/2012/12_12/12_03/120312_syria.htm

Women's Affairs Official Assassinated in Afghanistan

Gunmen assassinated an Afghan women's affairs official just months after her predecessor was blown up by a bomb, police said.

Nadia Sidiqi, the acting director of the women's affairs department in the eastern province of Laghman, was shot dead by two unidentified men while on her way to work in a motorised rickshaw.

“We have launched an investigation and we have sealed off the area where the attack took place and we will very soon capture the attackers,” Laghman police chief Ahmad Sherzad told AFP.

Sidiqi took over from provincial women's affairs director Hanifa Safi, who was killed when a magnetic bomb attached to her vehicle exploded in July.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for Monday's attack, but targeted assassinations are increasingly used by Taliban insurgents in their campaign against the Western-backed Kabul government. For more information follow the link

http://www.wunrn.com/news/2012/12_12/12_10/121012_afghanistan.htm



Street Harassment of Women in Yemen - Don't Blame Victims - Call for Law

Yemen needs an unambiguous law which punish harassers and not the victims, says Ghaidaa Al-Absi.

In my daily activism to fight street sexual harassment in Yemen I often find myself dealing with questions of blame. Sadly, this usually involves helping victims who are unfairly blamed for the acts of their perpetrators. Yet I also find myself asking who is to blame for the high percentage of sexual harassment in our country. According to a report released at a conference in Cairo in 1999, 90% of women are subjected to sexual harassment in Yemen, with evidence suggesting that this rises to 98% in Sana'a, the capital.

Since I wrote my initial article on street sexual harassment in Yemen on openDemocracy back in July, two questions in particular have been recurring in my mind. Is it enough to blame Yemeni law for not imposing stricter penalties for the crime of sexual harassment? Or, should we blame Yemeni society for dealing out impunity to the harassers and blame to the victims?

‘Offending Act in Public’: between legal understanding and erroneous application

One of the primary barriers to dealing with sexual harassment in Yemen is the inadequate legal framework. There is no specific law penalizing sexual harassment in Yemen, however,

there is a law penalizing ‘Offending Acts in Public’. As outlined in article 273 of the Yemeni Penal Code, it criminalizes ‘any act which offends public morality or honor, exposes private areas or involves speaking indecently’. Article 274 of the same law stipulates the punishment of imprisonment not exceeding 6 months or a fine for anyone committing an offending act which can be seen or heard by others. The loophole in this Penal Code is that it does not give a clear definition of what is meant by offending public morality. This makes it subject to the understanding of the law enforcer which can sometimes lead to perverse consequences for women. Often we read or hear that a woman has been arrested for offending public morality for simply going about her daily business, for example, for being outside with a man to whom she is not related. One woman was walking in the street with her fiancé when a police officer took them to the police station and accused them of committing an offending act in public. The woman had to call her father and ask him to come down to the station to prove to the police officers that the man was her fiancé. Far from using this law to stop harassers, in a cruel inversion of intent, some police officers thus clearly use article 273 to persecute women. The other loophole in this legal protection is that even where the law is applied against perpetrators of sexual harassment, the fine does not exceed 1000 YR - which is equivalent to around 5 US dollars. As recently stressed by Abdulghani Al-wajeeh, a patrolling police commander in Yemen Times, “it is essential to reword the law to include strict procedures because the 1,000 riyals fine doesn’t deter anyone and the risk of six-month imprisonment isn’t taken seriously.” Lawyer Al-Sakhi adds, “the last time the law was amended was in 1994 ... We need to modernize the law in order to go along with the current time.” There have been several proposals to amend the Penal Code in recent years to make the crime of sexual harassment more explicit and also to raise awareness of its current misapplication. A seminar organized by Yemeni Women Union in 2009, for example, entitled ‘Offending Act in Public between erroneous application and legal understanding’ was entirely devoted to this issue. Yet in spite of these initiatives little action has been taken on the legal front; for solutions, many people continue to look to societal change. “If she was a respectable she would not raise her voice”: the case for societal change

We have to keep in mind that the Yemeni context is very conservative: most people think that women are inferior and unlikely to have the need to go outdoors. Stereotypes also dictate that women need a guardian at all times and that, if left alone, they run the risk of sexual harassment. As long as the law remains inadequate and harassers continue to get away with impunity, society will also fail to respond.

A story was recently posted on our Safe Streets Facebook page by a man telling us about his experiences of conservative attitudes on a public bus in Sana'a. He said, "To combat sexual harassment in our country, we should not rely on our society because it gives a green light and protection for the harassers. I have seen with my own eyes a girl ... on the bus and seen her hitting a man sitting behind her. It turned out later that he was harassing her, reaching out his fingers to touch her back under her seat. I considered her response bravery, but the passengers around me on the bus had a different view. I heard them say the following, “if she was a respectable she would not raise her voice”; “daughters with good manners do not hit people”; “if she does not want anyone to bother her, why she is exposing herself?” Why do people blame the victims, especially when the victim is a woman, and seek to justify the actions of harassers?

There are plenty of similar stories in the book *It's happening in the streets*. This book, prepared and published by Safe Streets Campaign and funded by Tacticaltech (Tactical



Technology Collective), is a collection of true stories of women who have faced sexual harassment in Yemen. One of the most shocking concerns the teenage daughter of a woman called Om Arafat: "Aunt Om Arafat is a widow and has three daughters, I know her because she used to come to my mother's house to get monthly financial aid. One day when her daughter was on her way back home from school a 60 year old man from her neighborhood grabbed her breast and refused to let go. She managed to grab a stone and threw it at his face. He lost some teeth and had to go to hospital. People from the neighborhood asked Om Arafat to pay the medical treatment costs for the old man who harassed her daughter." How can we rely on society to apportion justice when people punished this girl and her mother because she taught the harasser a lesson?

Sexual harassment has become a societal disaster in Yemen and a fundamental threat to the security of women and men because it is allowed to thrive in a society which lets the victims pay the price for being harassed while the harassers get off free. The societal change needed to combat sexual harassment in Yemen can only come in partnership with penal reform. We need an unambiguous law which punishes harassers and not the victims. Read more http://www.wunrn.com/news/2012/12_12/12_03/120312_yemen.htm

Call to End Violent Attacks Against Female University Students in Sudan

December 13, 2012, 6 men wearing women Jilbab and face veiled, entered the girls dorm in Khartoum University, and attacked the Darfuri female students in the dorm. "They were shouting (ALLAH Akbar= God is the Greatest), and they were carrying big knives, they just started beating us, Iman a first year lost her finger, when one of the attackers injured her hand with his big knife, and during the fight they manage to unveil them" said (A-S) one of the dorm girls, she continued describing that horrific night saying " Asmaa , a first year student also in Khartoum University, severely injured in her hand, also while she was fighting with the attackers armed by knives. We couldn't sleep that night and we kept awake until our colleagues came back from hospital".



The Darfuri female student struggle started on November 26th, when they protested the denial of free registration and the tuition waiver in the university and the dorms by the Khartoum University administration. And when the administration refused all their appeals and denied the fresh students from entering the dorms and the university for free the Female students decided to take to the street. The free registration and the tuition waiver for Darfuri students is one of the rare accomplishments of the peace agreement between Darfur rebels groups and the Sudanese government. Darfur region is witnessing conflict since 2002 , where at least 200 thousands peoples died and 2 million are living in IDPs camps, which led to the indication of the Sudanese Omar Albashir of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide by the international Criminal court.

During the female students protests on November 26th and 27th , more than 250 female students took the street and beaten violently by the police and the security , 2 of the female student were severely injured and when they were went to the hospital they denied medical care for many hours, because the students wanted to have medical report to file a police report against the police and security members injured them, one of the girls has heart problem and she had been beaten on her chest which led to her to deteriorated her heart problem. The girls struggle with the dorms administration continued, as the dorms

administration and the Sudanese security considered the girls in the dorm are the main trouble makers in the university, because they were the spark of the Sudan Revolt, few months ago, there for the guards in the dorms doors replaced by National Security elements, and the dorm girls were forced to be searched in the doors and the security was intimidating them every day.

On December 7th, new development took place when 4 Darfuri male students found dead in a water canal near Aljazeera University, the four were detained by the National security and harassed during protesting against their University, because they denied also the fresh students the right to the tuition waiver. This accident led to wide protests in the Sudanese universities, and accompanied with violent crackdown from the Sudanese security. The Darfuri girls in the Khartoum University girls dorms, were in the frontline of the protests , which led to the night and day attacks and intimidations in the days 12 and 13 of December. On the same day of December 13th, around 2:00PM, new attack on the Darfuri female students inside the dorms took place. “ one of the female security members entered the dorm while were sleeping because were awake all the night and found Sara in one of the rooms alone, the female security element , started beating her and asking her about other students and where is their rooms and their houses, and when she refused to give her any information, the security element shaved her hair, and that was Sara screamed very loudly and we woke up and started beating the female security element until we found her security identification card, and then she ran away”, said (A-S). The Darfuri students in the Khartoum University girls dorms are living in constant fear for their lives, and they found no protection from the dorm or the university administration. The attack on the Darfuri girls is spreading the suffering of the women and girls of Darfur , as they are victims of mass rapes since the war erupted in their region a decade ago, and the few girls survived the harsh living conditions in the IDPs camps and managed to enter the university they face violent attack from the Sudanese government inside the universities, and the government deny its obligation toward them to provide them free education as part of the compensation for Darfuri peoples affected by the war. Arry Organization, calls on the Sudanese government to investigate this violent attacks and present the responsible persons to justice disregarding their positions or impunities. We also call on them stop the extreme use of force against peaceful students protestors and we call them to respect the right of freedom of assembly. For more information follow the link

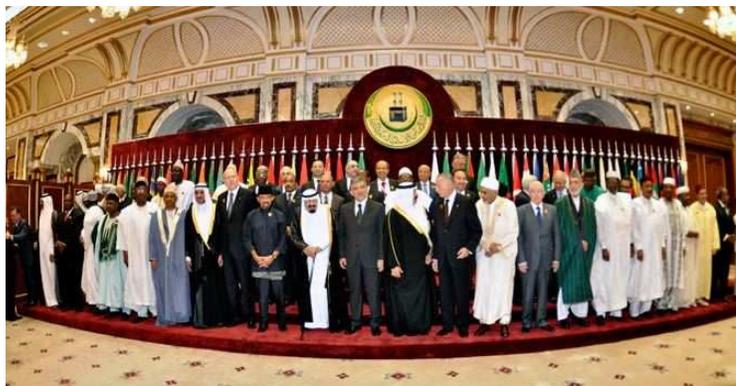
http://www.wunrn.com/news/2012/12_12/12_17/121712_sudan.htm

GENDER & HUMAN RIGHTS

OIC of Islamic States Approves Consultative Status for NGO's

The foreign ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states agreed to grant humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) consultative status in the OIC. At the 39th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM), held in Djibouti, 15-17 November 2012, the Rules for Granting OIC Consultative Status to Humanitarian NGOs headquartered in an OIC member state was approved.

“It is the first time in the history of the OIC that NGOs are granted this status, which is expected to bridge the big gap between coordinating the activities of governments and



humanitarian organizations in the member states,” said OIC Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu.

The Rules allow Humanitarian Non-governmental Organizations headquartered in an OIC Member State to apply for Consultative Status in the OIC. The humanitarian NGOs has to be registered officially and accredited to work in the activity specified in the application for consultative status. Muslim minorities and communities humanitarian relief organizations accredited in the States where these minorities and communities exist and operate in their favor can also apply.

The qualified humanitarian NGOs by the OIC would enable them to participate in the meetings relevant to their activities and to provide consultations and advice in the humanitarian field to promote the principles and objectives of the OIC Charter.

“Qualified humanitarian NGOs are expected to form a council and nominate a representative to the OIC. They will also hold a conference prior to OIC Summits in order to present their recommendations to the Muslim world leaders,” said OIC Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Atta El-Manan Bakhit. To read the entire article, follow the link:

<http://reliefweb.int/report/world/first-time-oic-history-humanitarian-ngos-granted-consultative-status>

Egypt's new constitution limits fundamental freedoms and ignores women's rights

‘It is appalling that virtually the only references to women relate to the home and family’ - Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

A draft constitution approved by Egypt’s Constituent Assembly falls well short of protecting human rights and, in particular, ignores the rights of women, restricts freedom of expression in the name of protecting religion, and allows for the military trial of civilians, Amnesty International said today.

In the document freedom of religion is limited to Islam, Christianity and Judaism - potentially excluding the right to worship to other religious minorities such as Baha’is and Shi’a Muslims.

The constitution also fails to provide for the supremacy of international law over national law, raising concerns about Egypt’s commitment to human rights treaties to which it is a state party. Furthermore, the document fails to fully guarantee economic, social and cultural rights, such as protection against forced evictions - it also tolerates child labour.

Meanwhile, Amnesty has expressed concern that the assembly - widely boycotted by opposition political parties and Christian churches - is not truly representative of Egyptian society. The body is dominated by the Freedom and Justice Party and the Nour Party.

At the outset, the assembly only included seven women and their numbers have since dwindled. Opposition political parties have withdrawn their members from the assembly, as have Christian churches, in protest at the assembly’s make-up and decisions. These have voiced a number of concerns, including the lack of representation of young people, of a variety political parties, and the role of Shari’a law has played - including in respect of women’s rights. The assembly also faced criticism for not doing enough to enshrine the right to adequate housing - a key concern for the estimated 12 million Egyptians living in slums.

A decree issued last week by President Morsi gave the Constituent Assembly an additional two months to complete its work. However on Wednesday the body announced that it would finalise the text in a day. Yesterday, the draft was rushed through a plenary session of the assembly, with no time for real debate or objections from the members.

Amnesty International Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui said:

“Instead of marking a return to order and the rule of law, the adopted text of the constitution has plunged Egypt into even greater chaos and deadlock.

“This document, and the manner in which it has been adopted, will come as an enormous disappointment to many of the Egyptians who took to the streets to oust Hosni Mubarak and demand their rights.

“The process of drafting the constitution was flawed from the outset, and has become increasingly unrepresentative.

“We urge President Morsi to put the drafting and referendum process back on the right path, one that includes all sectors of society, which respects the rule of law - including the vital role of an independent judiciary - and results in a constitution that enshrines human rights, equality and dignity for all.

“Provisions that purport to protect rights mask new restrictions, including on criticism of religion. Women, who were barely represented in the assembly, have the most to lose from a constitution which ignores their aspirations, and blocks the path to equality between men and women. It is appalling that virtually the only references to women relate to the home and family.”

When asked about the lack of women’s rights in the draft constitution yesterday in a state television interview, President Morsi said women were citizens like all others. The President’s position mirrors the approach of the Constituent Assembly in ignoring women’s rights.

The vote to approve the constitution came ahead of a 2 December ruling on the assembly’s legitimacy by the Supreme Constitutional Court, which was widely expected to order the body’s dissolution. President Morsi’s decree, which was announced on 22 November, prevents any judicial body from dissolving the assembly. The decree, which also removed the Public Prosecutor, granted the president sweeping powers and stopped the courts from challenging his decisions, has sparked widespread anger and protests in Egypt.

Opposition groups plan to march to the presidential palace today, while the Muslim Brotherhood has called for a protest to support the President on Saturday.

The draft constitution now passes to a national referendum which must take place within 15 days. Any such referendum would require supervision by judges but Egypt’s Judges Club, an independent network of judges numbering some 9,500 members, has announced that its members will not take part. Judges throughout the country are striking in protest at President Morsi’s decree, which they see as a threat to their independence.

Notes for editors:

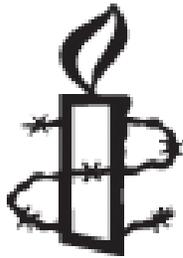
Amnesty International has a number of concerns about the contents of the draft. They include:

*Amnesty is particularly concerned that the constitution does not explicitly prohibit discrimination on the grounds of gender. Article 10 says that the state will work to strike a balance between the family duties of women and their work in society. Amnesty is further concerned that Article 219, which defines the principles of Shari’a law as being the “fundamental rules of jurisprudence,” may impact on the rights of women, and may be used as a justification to uphold legislation which currently discriminates against women in respect of marriage, divorce and family life. Article 2 establishes Shari’a law as the primary source of legislation.

*The constitution makes no reference to international law obligations, and does not provide for the supremacy of international law over Egyptian legislation. Though Egypt is a state party to a number of international human rights treaties, including the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

(ICESCR), and the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the constitution does not explicitly set out Egypt's obligations under each provision of those treaties, or make them directly enforceable to all individuals under Egyptian law.

*Article 33 states that citizens "are equal in public rights and duties and they shall not be discriminated against".



amnesty.org.uk

However, this article only protects Egyptian citizens, and not others such as refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. Furthermore, a list of specific prohibited grounds, which included sex, religion and origin, was removed in the last draft, failing to mirror the non-exhaustive formulation contained in the international covenants.

*Article 36 prohibits torture and other ill-treatment, including the use of "confessions" extracted under torture in criminal proceedings; however, Article 219 may allow for the imposition of corporal punishments that violate the prohibition of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

*The constitution has also failed to protect the rights of children. It does not define a child as any person under 18 years of age, as provided for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and does not protect children from early marriage. Furthermore, Article 70 permits children who are still in primary education to work, as long as the work is "adequate for their age". The article does not ensure children are protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous, as required by the CRC. The constitutional provisions also fail to comply with other treaties on children's rights ratified by Egypt, including the Minimum Age Convention, and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention. To read more follow the link

http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=20490

Egypt - Casts Ballots for New Constitution - 2-Part Process - Women

Long lines of people formed outside polling stations in the Egyptian capital Cairo Saturday, as voting got under way on a referendum for a controversial new constitution. The vote is being staggered over two successive Saturdays due to a boycott by a majority of the judiciary, which must oversee the vote by law. A crowd of women sang Egypt's national anthem as they stood in line to vote in Central Cairo Saturday. Men and women voted separately at schools across the capital and 9 other provinces to express approval or disapproval of the new constitution. Egypt's top opposition leaders, including Mohamed ElBaradei, who heads the National Salvation Front, urged supporters to vote "no." Islamist groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafist "Nour" Party called on their partisans to vote "yes." Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, who refused to postpone the referendum despite pleas from opposition leaders and much of the judiciary, was shown on state TV casting his ballot near the presidential palace. Morsi was surrounded by a large number of bodyguards.

Clashes erupt

Supporters and opponents of the controversial constitution clashed just hours before polls opened in the Egyptian port city of Alexandria. Amateur video showed crowds of young men throwing rocks and firecrackers at each other near the city's Qaid Ibrahim mosque.

The governor of Alexandria, Hassan Prinz, deplored the violence and urged voters to express their opinions at the ballot box. Prinz said that every citizen has the right to vote

yes or no and we must let the ballot box determine the future of the country, since this is democracy and we must accept it.

Former Arab League head and unsuccessful presidential candidate Amr Moussa was a bit more critical of the democratic process and its potential results. Moussa said that the opposition did not contest the election of President Mohamed Morsi, but that a constitution is different, because it should be accepted by a large majority of the people to be legitimate.

Divided opinion

Many Arab analysts point to the fact that Egyptian public opinion is extremely polarized over the controversial constitution, which was approved by a rump committee made up of mostly Islamist members, in a marathon overnight session, 15 days ago.

Egypt's Draft Constitution

- Limits president to two four-year terms
- Provides protections against arbitrary detention and torture
- Islamic law, or Sharia, serves as the basis for legislation
- Religious freedom is limited to Muslims, Christians and Jews
- Citizens are deemed equal before the law and equal in rights



The pros and cons appeared almost evenly divided, as voters expressed their opinions at a polling station on Manial Island in central Cairo. Ahmed, a civil engineer, said that he opposes the document because of the mostly Islamist composition of the committee. "The main problem, they always join Islamic rules with the politics," Ahmed noted. "And we want to separate between these rules, because we have Christian, Muslim maybe some Jewish."

Omar, a virologist, supports the document, because he thinks that it will give Egypt some much needed stability. Omar said that he is in favor of holding the referendum, although he has some reservations about the constitution per se. Omar said that he thinks the vote creates movement in the political process at a time when it is not a good idea to make the transition period longer.

Voting officials extended the election by two hours Saturday because of heavy voter turnout.

The voting has been split into two rounds over two Saturdays, each round covering different regions of the country.

Voters in 14 Egyptian provinces are due to vote next Saturday. It was not immediately clear when final results would be announced. Follow the link for more information

[http://www.wunrn.com/news/2012/12_12_17/121712_egypt.htm](http://www.wunrn.com/news/2012/12_12/12_17/121712_egypt.htm)

...and Egypt: The Day after the Referendum

It will pass... a draft of a constitution that doesn't represent Egyptians or their dreams. A draft that did not engage them in the dialogue for change, which passed just two before the referendum, without giving Egyptians the opportunity to discuss it. When the revolution started, Egyptians looked forward to a time where they could evaluate their beliefs and values, discuss them, even change them and reflect it all in a document that recorded the whole process. But this never happened. It will pass... the constitution that neglected most

of the Egyptians. I remember looking at my TV screen when the committee drafting the constitution was voting and asked myself, where am I? Where are half of my friends who are of different faiths? Where is my 63 year old mother? How could they pass all these articles in one night with unclear methods of voting? No one in this assembly represented me and when they wrote the draft they did not think of me or of many others. They drafted and voted on articles that represent the vision of the Muslim Brotherhoods, their allies of socially conservative groups and Islamists groups such as the Salafis.

The draft represents a vision that sees women's perfect place as in the house as a wife and a mother while the state could help her if she becomes a widow or get a divorce. It refers in article (10) to the role of the State and the society in maintaining the authentic character of the Egyptian family, and how they should work on its cohesion, stability and protection and of its traditions and moral values (I hope that a husband beating his wife is not considered part of these values). While Article (68) had guaranteed the rights and equality of women and men in all sectors of society, including political, cultural, economic and social life "and all other fields," the drafters felt the need to add "without prejudice to the provisions of Islamic Shari'a" which opens the door to many contradictory practices that claim to be based on Shari'a law.

Article (68) reads "The State provides the services of motherhood and childhood for free. The state ensures the women's health care, social and economic rights and the right of inheritance and reconcile with her duties towards the family and her work in the society. The state provides protection and special attention of household, divorced, and widowed women and other women who are most in need," so how about me? While I praise the drafters for considering the "personal status" of different women, I wonder why they have to define women as being part of a family or formerly part of a family and now "divorced, widowed."

I could go on analyzing every article and their contradictions, but what I care about most is the philosophy embedded in the draft. A philosophy that praises conservative social norms for women, children, youth, ethnic and religious minorities; a draft that introduces a political system that would be hard to describe as democratic in which the military keeps its special political and economic gains; and an economic system that adopts many of the guidelines of neo-liberalism. Despite this philosophy the draft will pass and we have to think of "The Day After the Referendum".

So if Egyptians who will say "No" to the draft and the groups who will boycott are aware that it will pass, what is the reason behind all these confrontations, sit-ins and demonstrations? The simple answer is: the revolution not over. Because we are still in the process of re-evaluating our values as individuals and as a whole society, the answer is that the president should be held accountable for mistakes and should be stopped if tried to turn himself into a "dictator", and that democracy is not about a constitution, president and a parliament.

The solution is not having a new constitution that limits the powers of the president as claimed, or forgetting that "Morsi" failed to fulfill or even start to think about the aspirations of the Egyptian society. The protests against him are against his failure, his party (which no one can deny is the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood groups), and their attempt to play to the ambitious of the Egyptian society while in power. The protests are reminders of the continuing revolution and the rights that were not fulfilled.

The revolution continues because those who are in power failed to defend the rights of many Egyptians which were violated for years under Mubarak's regime and in the last two years while the Supreme Council of Armed Forces were running the country.

So we are not just looking for a system that solves the problems of the last two years but to go further than this and dig deep into the society and its problems. We are not looking for a dysfunctional democracy as was the case for the last 30 years where “Martial Laws” were effective all the time. We are not looking for a “Morsi” who could easily turn into a dictator supported by a party and a group defending his powers violently. We are not the “opposition” who just wants to halt “democracy.” We don’t want “this” democracy - *this is not democracy.*

I remember a friend from Honduras who has been in the opposition camp against the leaders of the coup d’etat since 2009; she told me, “One day your revolution will have the same slogan as us ‘Ni Olvido.... Ni Perdon’ which means ‘Don’t forget... Do not forgive.’” And it is the case now in Egypt. So I hope those commenters and analysts who call for us to give a chance to this so- called “democracy” stop such calls, because we need to go on. To read the entire article follow the link <http://ht.ly/g58pL>

A Revolution Against Shame for Women in Egypt

By Yasmine Nagaty, a political science graduate from the American University in Cairo and a Project Coordinator in the NGO, Misr Elkheir, in Egypt.

There is no room for doubt that violence against women is a worldwide phenomenon that is not exclusive to any specific culture or race. The phenomenon merely manifests itself in varying shapes and degrees in different parts of the world and strikes different nerves in the respective societies. In Egypt, perhaps one of the most glaring indicators of the growth of this phenomenon is sexual violence and the politics of “shaming” Egyptian women. In the aftermath of the January 25th revolution and the ongoing struggle for freedom in Egypt, the question of state sponsored sexual violence and capitalization on the discourse of “shaming” has become a critically important topic of discussion.

Although sexual violence predates the revolution, Egypt has been making headlines for the past two years for mob street harassment. As security in the country began to wane, such incidents have rocketed for many reasons. In part, this exists in order to deter Egyptian women from taking to the streets in protest.

In a country where women’s “chastity” is held at high regard, such gross violations of a woman’s physical space have been successful in shaming Egyptian women - they have successfully struck a nerve. Blame is always cast on a woman’s “tight” clothes, her flirty body language and sometimes even on her “seductive looks.” In another life, these arguments would be too ludicrous to be taken seriously but they comprise a social and political tool of coercion.

Again, this is not new, but has recently magnified in size and frequency. What has become glaringly “new” as far as shaming and sexual violence is concerned is the role of the state in capitalizing on such discourse.

In November of 2011, as female activists were targeted by many sexual offenders, Egyptians witnessed an unforgettable scene in which three army soldiers stripped naked, and violently assaulted a female protester. As protests against military rule rapidly increased, stripping female protestors became a widespread trend.

The strategy was deliberate and successful in fuelling accusations of immorality against victims of such violence. The victim in question was criticized for failing to wear “enough” layers of clothing and an avalanche of theories about “immorality” of Egyptian female protestors ensued.

So where does the process of “shaming” and immortalizing women come from? The most commonly made argument is religion, but such an argument is also furthest from the truth. Islam calls for modest dress, but there is no evidence in the Quran or Hadith granting men the right to judge a woman’s conformity to this principle, let alone the right to sexually

assault her! Indeed, assuming that a man comes across a woman deemed as sexually provocative, the following Quranic verse provides clear instructions that provide no excuse neither for sexual assault or shaming the woman in question:

“Tell the believing men to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts). That is purer for them. Verily, Allah is All-Aware of what they do” [al-Noor 24:30]

Instead, how is this process perpetuated as a matter of political strategy? When presidential elections eventually took place, “putting an end to military rule,” a new President, Mohamed Morsi, was instilled in power. Soon enough, as dissatisfaction with the Morsi regime grew, finally erupting into violent clashes, female activists were again targeted and deliberately assaulted.

This time, a number of anti-sexual assault movements began to emerge, so that women could challenge these targeted assaults. One of the most vibrant movement is *Tahrir Bodyguard*, an organization created solely for the protection of women protestors in Tahrir Square against all manners of sexual violence.

Like several challenges brought by women to the violent status quo, *Tahrir Bodyguard* immediately picked up mass support. Indeed, never before 2012 had Egypt witnessed such high awareness about and resistance to sexual violence against women.

Before the revolution, sexual violence and especially street harassment had been hidden effectively. Even reporting a case of sexual harassment seemed ludicrous to many, as the police failed to take the crime seriously. Instead, women were blamed for their dress or behaviour and for “provoking” the incident. But today, numerous movements have targeted sexual harassment specific to certain occasions, such as during *Eid* vacations and during protests in Tahrir Square.

These activist movements are met with a resilient opposition. When one such anti-harassment group took to the streets during Eid - a peak occasion for harassment - to spray harassers as a mechanism of defamation, they were met with violent reactions. This week female protestors have been targeted more than ever outside the Presidential Palace and assaulters take specific pride in taunting them in spite of the massive effort trying to ensure a safe environment for women. At the end of the day, despite such formidable resistance from individual women and from their movements, the reality on



sexual violence remains fraught unless two developments take place. Firstly, Egypt's upcoming constitution and legal system must install legislation that protects women.

This is one of the main criticisms of the rushed constitutional draft that is expected to be voted on in a referendum. It fails to ensure that sufficient penalties will be applied to the perpetrators of violence against women. To read the article follow the link http://www.wunrn.com/news/2012/12_12/12_03/120312_egypt2.htm

RESOURCES & CALLS

ANNOUNCEMENTS & CALLS

Call for Registration - International Conference on Widows' Empowerment

Enriching the Journey towards Empowerment of Widows 4-6 February, 2013

The three day International Conference on 'Enriching the Journey towards Empowerment of Widows' will be held in Nepal on February 4-6, 2013. The conference will be organized by Women for Human Rights, Single Women Group (WHR) with financial and technical assistance from UNDEF and strategic partner organizations.

Purpose of the Conference:

Immediate action is required. WHR calls for the international community to join hands in the quest for justice and human rights for widows around the world.

We aim to disseminate the outcome of the conference at the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 57) under the theme of Violence against Women. We intend to take the opportunity to express our continuing support for the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform of Action (BPfA) and UNSCR 1325 and 1820.

The conference will provide a forum for these women to express their concerns. The international agencies, UN and donor community needs to respond on the journey of widows towards empowerment.

WHR decided to organize an international conference under the theme of 'Enriching the Journey towards Empowerment of Widows so that widows around the world will have the opportunity to assert their rights. This forum will generate solidarity among the organization working for the rights of widows and pave ways for a movement that will ensure them that their voices would be heard.

Objectives:

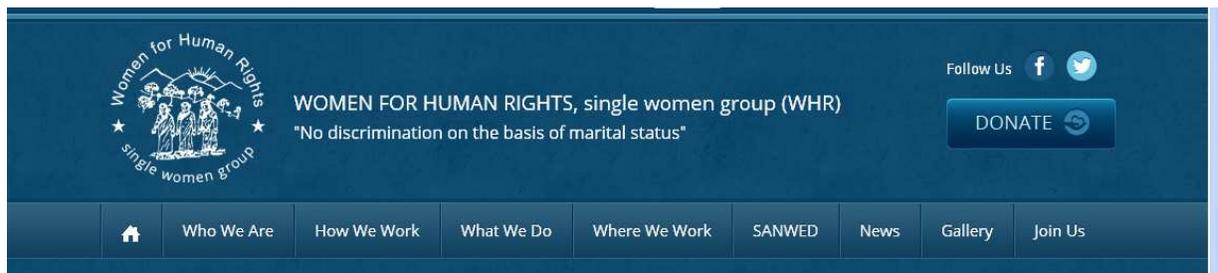
1. To bring the concerns of UN and other international bodies on the need of Separate UN Resolution on Widowhood .
2. To recognize that widows are the key resources of the community and to Strengthen an effective Network of Widows' organization in the different regions of the world.
3. To consider widows' empowerment an important indicator of overall national development and to ensure funding for widows' empowerment.
4. To form a Global Working Group to ensure the rights of widows as stipulated in Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), and Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820.
5. To develop a General Recommendation as a base for the shadow report on CEDAW on widowhood collectively under international law to ensure the enactment of resolutions that protects the legal and customary rights of the widows.

Who can participate?

Organization working for widow's empowerment, individual researchers, professionals, journalists, activists, youths, SANWED, member organizations and students

Venue and Date:

Conference will be organized in Kathmandu from 4th to 6th February 2013



Registration:

Registration must be done till 10th January 2013 by E mail. International Participants except SANWED member organizations, will have to pay \$100 for registration. Organizer will bear the cost of lodging during the event. Participants will have to manage the travel expenses by themselves.

Agenda of the program will be provided after the registration. For more information follow the link <http://whr.org.np/join-us/international-conference-on-violence-against-widows/#.UNSzS-Q3sbB>

CSW 57 NGO Parallel Events Application

The NGO Committee on the Status of Women, NY (NGO CSW/NY) organizes an NGO CSW Forum that includes an NGO CSW Forum Consultation Day and NGO CSW Forum Parallel Events during the annual UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meeting in New York. NGO CSW Forum Consultation Day will be held on 3 March 2013 from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm in preparation for CSW 57. NGO CSW Forum Parallel Events will be held from 4-15 March 2013.

The NGO CSW Forum is an open process, a democratic space where boys and girls, men and women can advocate for gender equality, development and peace. These events are convened by the NGO CSW/NY in cooperation with our sister organizations in Geneva and Vienna under the umbrella of the Conference of NGOs (CoNGO). We are a volunteer-based organization, funded largely by donations and contributions by members and participants.

Please note that the NGO CSW/NY prints a handbook each year containing key CSW documents and events, as well as greetings and advertisements from NGOs. You can sponsor the handbook by purchasing an ad. The deadline to purchase an ad is 7 January 2013. We regret that no refunds are possible.

Your contribution will help other women have fruitful experiences at the NGO CSW Forum.

For more information please follow the link <http://www.ngocsw.org/ngo-csw-forum>



BOOKS & REPORTS

Protection of Land Investments & Policies for Small Women Farmers

A recent wave of large-scale land acquisitions and other commercial investment in agriculture has raised concerns that small-scale producers are being marginalized. Worldwide, around 500 million small farms support almost two billion people - nearly one-third of the



global population. What role can public policy play in ensuring that commercial investment and agricultural markets benefit smallholder producers, both women and men, while respecting the environment? Oxfam and IIED collaborated on research to take a new look at the role of public policy and market governance at a national level in supporting inclusive sustainable development. This report identifies key policy levers that can tip commercial investments in favour of either small- or large-scale farming. And it shows how policy levers influence market governance to constrain or to support the fair sharing of risk and reward between small-scale producers and the rest of the market. **A key element of the report is the examination of policy elements that can specifically contribute to gender-equitable results.** Four country case studies, conducted in Guatemala, Nigeria, Tanzania and the Philippines, supported the research. For more information and to read the report follow the link http://www.wunrn.com/news/2012/12_12/12_17/121712_protection.htm

Labour, Migration, Gender, Sexual & Reproductive Health & Rights

This ARROW bulletin presents articles that analyse the intersections between SRHR, gender and migration in East Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific. It identifies gaps in research, policy and programming on migration from a gender and SRHR perspective; and provides recommendations for SRHR, gender, and migration stakeholders such as policymakers; civil society organisations; service



providers; advocates and activists. It also showcases examples from the region of catalytic and effective initiatives and responses addressing SRHR issues of women migrant workers. Follow the direct Link to Full 28-Page Publication:
<http://arrow.org.my/publications/AFC/v19n1.pdf>

Stories of Iranian Activists in Exile

The 62-page report documents the experiences of dozens of rights defenders, journalists and bloggers, and lawyers whom security and intelligence forces targeted because they spoke out against the government. Some who took part in anti-government protests after the 2009 election had never been politically active before, but suddenly found themselves in the crosshairs of security and intelligence forces. Many Iranian refugees and asylum seekers interviewed by Human Rights Watch described difficult conditions and long processing times for their asylum applications during their stay in Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan. For more information follow the link

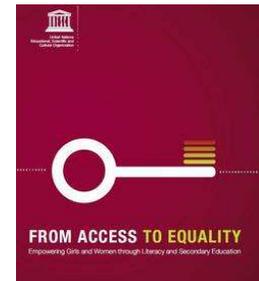
http://www.wunrn.com/news/2012/12_12/12_10/121012_iran2.htm



Empowering Girls & Women through Literacy & Secondary Education

Within the framework of UNESCO's Global Partnership for Girl's and Women's Education: "Better Life, Better Future", this newly published Report makes the case for education as a means for empowerment for girls and women.

Through an illustration of cases studies and examples from around the world, the Report puts in perspective the multiple benefits of investing in girls' and women's education whether through formal or non-formal education. With a focus on secondary education and literacy, it highlights enabling factors that contribute to closing the gender gap. Direct Link to Full 78-Page 2012 UNESCO Publication: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002184/218450e.pdf>



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