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Middle East & North Africa Gender And Development Electronic Brief

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Women on the front at Raqqa: an interview with Kimmie Taylor

What is the reality of war like for the women of Rojava as they advance on Raqqa? Kimmie Taylor from Britain is on the frontline and puts us in the picture.

It is 4am, just before dawn, in a god-forsaken spot ten kilometres away from Raqqa, when a band of Daesh fighters start shooting from a small building outside the Kurdish defense base at the building where the YPJ, the Women's Defence Force, are based. Kimmie Taylor, a 27-year-old woman from Blackburn, who I met in Rojava, now known as the Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria, in March 2016 is attached to this unit as their 'media officer'. She is sleeping in this building full of women soldiers when the attack takes place. Although she received military training (for a mere 10 days), her job is to shoot a camera, not a gun. She is not sent to where the fighting is fiercest, much to her chagrin. But this morning before she can reach for her camera, Kimmie reaches for her gun.

After an hour and a half of exchanging fire, one Daesh creeps out, manages to break across the 3mx3m deep trench surrounding the base and blow himself up meters away from Kimmie, his blood and guts splattering her and leaving her feeling sick for days and unable to eat. Another Daesh emerges and is shot before he can blow himself up. The coalition planes arrive and bomb the building. But the fighting continues until one lone sniper who was not in the building at the time is shot.

Read more:

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/rahila-gupta/women-on-front-at-raqqa>

Women's rights activist questioned in Saudi Arabia

Jailed blogger Raif Badawi's sister alleges she has been questioned over her activism twice in past year



Saudi Arabian authorities on Wednesday questioned the sister of jailed blogger Raif Badawi over her activism, the second time in 12 months, she said on Twitter.

"Today's investigation is related to previous issues about my HR [human rights] and civil activities including women's campaign against male guardians," Samar Badawi said in a Twitter post, hours after she had been summoned to appear before investigators in Jeddah. "Thanks and regards for those who supported me and prayed for me. You are my real strength," Badawi tweeted on Wednesday, not mentioning whether she expected further questioning.

Saudi Arabia has some of the world's tightest restrictions on women, and is the only country where they are not allowed to drive. Under Saudi Arabia's guardianship system a male family member, normally the father, husband or brother, must grant permission for a woman's study, travel and other activities.

Read more:

<http://newsweekpakistan.com/womens-rights-activist-questioned-in-saudi-arabia/>

Saudi Arabia celebrates its first ever Women's Day in Riyadh

Ultra-conservative Islamic kingdom is ranked 134 out of 145 countries for gender equality.



Saudi Arabia has celebrated its own Women's Day, a first for the ultra-conservative Islamic kingdom.

A three-day gathering was held at the King Fahd Cultural Centre in the capital of Riyadh.

It featured speakers who argued for women's rights to drive and called for an end to the country's male guardianship system.

Female members of the Saudi royal family also attended the event, with Princess Al-Jawhara bint Fahd Al-Saud hosting a discussion on women's roles in education.

"We want to celebrate the Saudi woman and her successful role, and remind people of her achievements in education, culture, medicine, literature and other areas," Mohammed Al-Saif, a spokesman for the centre, told Arab News.

The kingdom has been heavily criticised for its record on women's rights, where women are severely restricted.

The World Economic Forum's 2015 Global Gender Gap report ranked Saudi Arabia 134 out of 145 countries for gender equality.

Read more

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-first-ever-womens-day-riyadh-ultra-conservative-islamic-kingdom-guardianship-driving-a7563586.html>

Former student from Blackburn becomes first British woman to fight Isis in Syria

Kimberley Taylor, 27, says she is battling for a socialist and feminist 'revolution'



Just A former student from Blackburn is believed to have become the first British woman to fight Isis alongside Kurdish forces in Syria. Kimberley Taylor, 27, is currently embedded with the Women's Protection Units (YPJ) in northern Syria, where the group is being supported by international air strikes to drive jihadis out of territory surrounding their de-facto capital in Raqqa.

Also known by her adopted Kurdish name Zilan Dilmar, she is working for the YPJ's media team to record and broadcast their operations, but also fights to defend the group's camps from frequent attacks.

Read more:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/syria-anti-isis-fighters-british-volunteers-women-kurds-ypg-yjp-kimberley-kimmie-taylor-blackburn-a7574171.html>

Females In The Middle East Show Solidarity With The Women's March

Women in Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon stand up in support of women's rights around the world.



Millions have gathered around the world, including in the Middle East, in a display of support for women on US President Donald Trump's first day in office.

The Women's March on Washington started as a Facebook event which aimed to send a clear message to the new administration: *Women's rights are human rights.*

The event quickly went viral, and led to the formation of more than 670 sister marches worldwide, which took place on Saturday, January 21 across countries including Iraq, Kenya, Australia and Japan.

Organisers are estimating a global turnout of at least 4.7 million people, who took to the streets to protest the 45th President of the United States' controversial stance on women's rights, reproductive rights and immigration, along with some of his misogynistic comments about women.

Read more:

<http://emirateswoman.com/women-in-the-middle-east-show-solidarity-with-the-womens-march-on-washington/>

UAE Companies Will Get A Guidebook On How To Adopt Gender Equality

"I do believe that one woman can have the worth of a thousand men in the workforce," says Sheikh Mohammed at the World Government Summit.

Companies in the UAE will be issued a guide to promoting gender equality in the workplace, the Gender Balance Council has announced.

The *Gender Balance Guide: Good Practices for the UAE Organisations* offers a comprehensive set of instructions for helping staff adopt a "gender-sensitive approach" in the office.

The guide was revealed at the World Government Summit – which is currently being held in Dubai – by Gender Balance Council vice president, [HE Mona Al Marri](#).

The council will now consult organisations for suggestions for the guide over the next few months.

"The Gender Balance Guide is yet another key initiative of the Gender Balance Council that supports the UAE's vision for enhancing women's role as key partners and contributors in building the future of our nation," said HH Sheikha Manal bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, President of the UAE Gender Balance Council and President of the Dubai Women Establishment.

"This initiative further strengthens our efforts to reduce the gender gap across all sectors, enhance the UAE's ranking in global competitiveness reports on gender equality and achieve gender balance in decision-making positions, as well as promote the UAE as a model for gender balance."

Read more:

<http://emirateswoman.com/uae-companies-are-getting-a-guidebook-on-how-to-adopt-gender-equality/>

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Sexual harassment common even for Iraqi women professionals

Iraqi women are dealing with worsening harassment in the workplace and sexual abuse in general, according to statements made by Iraqi members of parliament and media reports.



On Jan. 15, 2017, parliament member Aaliyah Nasif revealed that she has been receiving complaints of sexual harassment of female employees in a number of ministries, while on Jan. 17, Education Minister Mohammad Iqbal dismissed the director-general of the ministry for soliciting sexual favors in exchange for a promotion.

On Jan. 17, a Finance Ministry employee told Al-Aalem newspaper that her division director trapped her in the “vault,” the place where documents are archived, after she refused to become his secretary, a position that would have entailed harassment by him.

Kurdistan Alliance parliamentarian Rizan Sheikh Dalir, who was interviewed in the report, told Al-Monitor, “Women are perceived as inferiors by the male politicians.

Read more:

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/02/iraqi-elite-sexual-harassment.html#ixzz4Yr6l43m0>

Woman beaten by husband refused divorce because 'violence isn't a reason', say Israeli judges

Religious leaders described domestic violence as 'non-recurring' despite man being arrested on three separate occasions



Rabbis have refused a victim of domestic violence a divorce because they said they understood why her husband beat her and did not think it would happen again.

The woman’s husband was first jailed when he assaulted her after she said she wanted to leave him. Since then he has been charged with attacking her on two more occasions.

But a group of Jewish judges in Jerusalem have ruled the attack was not grounds for a gett — a religious divorce — because the husband had apologized and expressed remorse for what they described as “non-recurring” violence. A regional religious court first denied the woman a divorce in July, shortly before her husband was found guilty of assaulting her. A few weeks later, she called the police to report that her husband had punched her in the face and bruised her shoulder, *Haaretz* reported.

Read more:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/woman-beaten-by-husband-refused-a-divorce-because-violence-isnt-a-reason-to-end-a-relationship-a7572986.html>

Egypt shuts El Nadeem Centre for torture victims

Police seal El Nadeem Centre after two attempts to close it, claiming the rights group violated terms of its licence.



Egyptian authorities have closed the offices of a prominent human rights group that helps victims of violence and torture, according to the organisation and a police official quoted by the AFP news agency.

El Nadeem Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture in Cairo was shut on Thursday.

"About 15 policemen in official uniform with a group of civilians sealed three apartments in the building belonging to El Nadeem," Aida Seif el-Dawla, a co-founder of the nongovernmental organisation, told AFP news agency by phone.

"We didn't violate any rules and the government has not provided any reasons for its closure decision."

Seif el-Dawla said the centre had filed a lawsuit against the order.

Read more:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/02/egypt-shuts-el-nadeem-centre-torture-victims-170209143119775.html>

GENDER & HUMAN RIGHTS

The asset freeze of Nazra for Feminist Studies and its founder and executive director is not an end to its feminist work

North Cairo Elementary Court decided today, 11 January 2017, to freeze the assets of feminist and woman human rights defender Mozn Hassan, Founder and Executive Director of "Nazra for Feminist Studies", freeze the assets of "Nazra for Studies" Company, and to freeze the assets of "Nazra for Feminist Studies".

The asset freeze verdict is based on the judge's request in Case 173 for 2011, known as the "NGO Foreign Funding" Case.

The asset freeze of "Nazra for Feminist Studies" is a precedent in the case 173, and in the history of civil women's human rights' organizations, as no civil associations have had their assets frozen in the case. These developments take place within the context of targeting "Nazra for Feminist Studies" in Case 173, in spite of Nazra being a registered NGO since 2007; where on 22 March 2016, 3 of its members were summoned for investigation, and Mozn Hassan was summoned on 29 March 2016 and went to court when the judge decided to postpone the investigation indefinitely.

And despite the fact that Hassan was not investigated with in any of the charges directed at her, she was banned from travel on 27 June 2016, and her assets and those of the NGO were frozen based on these charges.

Read more:

<https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/asset-freeze-nazra-feminist-studies-and-its-founder-and-executive-director-not-end>

Do Iranian MPs want to send working women back home?

On Jan. 15, Iranian lawmakers approved a new law that would oblige state-run and public organizations to accept early retirement requests of female employees who have worked at least 20 years, without pushing any age limit.

At present, the age limit for early retirement of women covered by the Social Security Organization (SSO) is 52. The law needs to be approved by the constitutional watchdog, the Guardian Council, before going into effect.

The legislation, which is part of the sixth Five-Year Economic Development Plan (March 2017-March 2022), has prompted a swift outcry by pension authorities. Given that most pension funds rely heavily on government resources to meet their obligations, officials have complained that the move would impose a heavy financial burden on not only struggling pension funds but also the state budget.

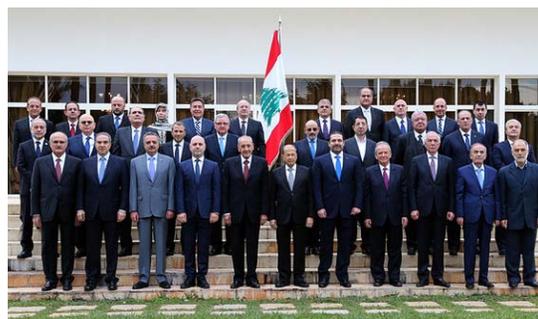
In August 2016, First Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri had revealed that the administration covers 70% of pension costs, while some funds, such as the Armed Forces Social Security Organization, are fully state funded. A day after the controversial Jan. 15 vote, Deputy Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare Hojjatollah Mirzaei called on the Guardian Council to stop the “naive” decision, warning that it will affect 150,000 employees within an immediate time frame. He further warned that the legislation will impose a financial burden of about 100 trillion rials (\$3.08 billion) on the Civil Servants Retirement Organization (CSRO), the country’s second-largest fund, if it goes into effect.

Read more:

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/02/iran-working-women-pension-reform-social-security.html#ixzz4Yr5vUYIJ>

Lebanon's new women's affairs minister fails to charm

Since the new year, several Lebanese rights groups have been demanding that the government established by Prime Minister Saad Hariri on Dec. 18 implement a quota of 30% of seats for women in the May parliamentary elections. Women's rights organizations had expressed dissatisfaction over the appointment of a man to head the new Ministry for Women's Affairs, Jean Ogasapian.



Hariri's newly appointed government is composed of 29 men and one woman, and a ministry for women's affairs was implemented for the first time in Lebanon. Led by Ogasapian, a parliamentarian from the Future Movement and consultant for private and public institutions on social cohesion and women's empowerment, this ministry will have the task of advocating for new laws and amendments favorable to the advancement of women in Lebanese society.

The day after the news broke, the feminist organization Kafa issued a press release condemning the creation of a special ministry for women and the fact that only one minister is a woman. Kafa criticized the idea of one ministry specialized in women's affairs and said women should not be exiled to one institution.

Read more:

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/lebanon-government-women-ministry-men.html#ixzz4Yr7cWejw>

What A Trump Presidency Might Mean For The UAE (And Women Around The World)

Dreams of a first female US President have been shattered...

It's the biggest shock of the year since Brexit.

Donald Trump, the businessman who controversially announced he wanted to ban Muslims from entering the US during his candidacy campaign, has been elected the new President of the United States.

Beating rival Hillary Clinton with 276 electoral college votes to her 218 according to reports, the Republican is now set to move into the White House.

"Now it's time for America to bind the wounds of division," he said in his victory speech.

"Working together we will begin the urgent task of rebuilding our nation and renewing the American dream."

While the after-effects start to ripple through the States, changes are already starting to be felt right here in the UAE.

Stocks are down, the dirham is wavering, and social media is up in arms about the election.

HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, has already sent a message of congratulations to Trump, saying he was looking forward to working together for a more peaceful, tolerant world.

However not everyone's so optimistic. Here we break down how a Donald Trump presidency could affect things here in the UAE, and on a slightly wider scale.

Read more:

<http://emirateswoman.com/trump-presidency-might-mean-uae/>

Veil fracas and protests mar last day of Le Pen visit

Controversy marred the final day of far-right French Presidential candidate Marine Le Pen's visit to Lebanon when the grand mufti declined to meet her after she refused to don a veil.



Controversy marred the final day of far-right French Presidential candidate Marine Le Pen's visit to Lebanon when the grand mufti declined to meet her after she refused to don a veil.

"When I met with Grand Imam of Al-Azhar [Sheikh Ahmad al-Tayeb], I didn't wear a hijab and I will not wear it now," Le Pen told reporters as she left the Sunni religious leader's Beirut headquarters of Dar al-Fatwa.

Le Pen said she had informed Grand Mufti Abdel-Latif Derian's staff that she would not wear a veil as requested. "The meeting was not canceled despite the fact that I had made my position [clear]," she told reporters at a news conference Tuesday. "When I arrived, they required that I wear the veil to see the mufti. I said it was out of the question ... so I did a 180 and did not see the grand mufti."

Read more:

<https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/feb-22/394609-veil-fracas-and-protests-mar-last-day-of-le-pen-visit.ashx>

Feminist' Swedish Officials Defend Wearing Hijabs For Visit To Iran

They were criticised for donning traditional dress, but government officials say they didn't want to break the law.

They were sent to the Middle East to negotiate trade deals, however it was instead their outfits that stole headlines.

Several Swedish officials have been slammed for wearing hijabs during a visit to Iran over the weekend, with critics saying they should have taken a stand as representatives for the self-declared "feminist government".

Sweden's Prime Minister Stefan Lofven and Trade Minister Ann Linde led a small team to the conservative country, where the female delegates were pictured wearing the Islamic headscarf.

Their decision was criticised by Swedish politicians and an Iranian women's rights activist, with the Scandinavian nation's Liberal party chief Jan Bjorklund saying the move was "ruinous to what is called a feminist foreign policy".

"Because if you are feminists and you care about equality then you should challenge inequality everywhere," Iranian activist and journalist Masih Alinejad added, reports the *BBC*. "They must stand for their own values."

However Linde defended the fact that the 12 female delegates – accompanied by three men – chose to wear hijabs, saying they were not willing to break Iranian law.

"It's their law, unlike in Saudi Arabia where it is not required by law to wear a veil," Linde told the *Aftonbladet* newspaper.

Read more:

<http://emirateswoman.com/feminist-swedish-officials-defend-wearing-hijabs-for-visit-to-iran/>

Women's Gyms Are Finally Going To Be Widely Allowed In Saudi Arabia

When it comes to keeping on top of their fitness, women in Saudi Arabia have been somewhat restricted.

Currently, it's incredibly difficult to open female-only gyms in the ultra-conservative kingdom – however, that looks set to soon change.

Authorities intend to start granting licences for women's gyms from the end of this month, Princess Reema bint Bandar told local newspaper *Okaz*.

The royal, who is vice president for women's affairs at the General Authority of Sports, revealed the aim is to eventually open work-out centres in every neighbourhood across the country.

The licenses will be approved for gyms that focus on fitness and weight-loss activities, such as running, swimming and weightlifting. However facilities that want to offer "competitive activities", such as team-based sports like football and tennis, won't be granted licences.

The move is reportedly hoped to encourage Saudi women to embrace healthier lifestyles, as well as forming part of Vision 2030, the kingdom's post-oil economy plans.

Workshops and seminars will be launched within the next two months in order to inspire women to invest in fitness facilities.

Read more:

<http://emirateswoman.com/womens-gyms-are-finally-going-to-be-allowed-in-saudi-arabia/>

Separated: the challenges of relocation and family reunification for refugees arriving in Greece

Around 50,000 people who have fled conflict and hardship now find themselves stranded in Greece. They are living in a legal limbo that is exacerbating the stress and suffering many are already experiencing after leaving their homes and livelihoods under horrendous circumstances.

Legal analysis and qualitative interviews carried out by ActionAid show that the EU and Greece are failing to meet their obligations to protect and promote the human and refugee rights of the people arriving in Greece, in particular their rights to family life and family reunification. ActionAid has also found that the narrow definition of “family” used by the EU means that often parents cannot be reunited with their adult children. Siblings over 18 years of age are not provided with an opportunity to reunite, and family ties across generations are broken as asylum-seekers find themselves in different countries. This causes stress and grief amongst people who are already suffering the loss of their normal life as they have travelled across the world. It also breaks family ties and networks that are essential not only to the asylum-seekers themselves, but also to the societies in which they will eventually integrate.

Read more:

<http://www.actionaid.org/publications/separated-challenges-relocation-and-family-reunification-refugees-arriving-greece>

For a direct link to report:

http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/aa_relocation_reunification_report_eng.pdf

8 Ways the Trump Administration's Executive Orders Harm Refugee Women and Children



Women's Refugee Commission
Research, Policy, Action

8 Ways the Trump Administration's Executive Orders Harm Refugee Women and Children

Shahil Costa, Executive Director of the Women's Refugee Commission, outlines some of the consequences of the Administration's recent policy announcements.

- 1. Punishes women and children who are fleeing some of the world's worst conflicts.**
The war in Syria, the violence perpetrated by ISIS, and other conflicts around the world directly target women and children when rape is used as a weapon of war, when women and girls are forced into sexual slavery, and when they are subjected to gender-based violence. The U.S. resettlement program is one way to protect them from these life-threatening assaults.
- 2. Leaves refugee women and children seeking resettlement stranded in danger and limbo.**
By suspending the refugee resettlement program, women and children who have already gone through an extensive vetting process, and have been cleared to enter into the U.S. are now forced to remain in dangerous situations.
- 3. Punishes asylum-seeking women and children by pushing them back at the border.**
The Executive Order (EO) shuts off access to asylum for countries asylum seekers, including many women and children who are fleeing violence and persecution.
- 4. Targets everyone for immigration enforcement and deportation.**
No one is safe. The order will target women who are trying to escape abusive relationships, mothers of U.S. citizen children, and countless others.
- 5. Tears families apart.**
Children face traumatic and potentially permanent separation when their parents are detained and/or deported. Some may end up in the U.S. foster system despite having family who want and are able to care for them.
- 6. Deprives access to reproductive health care.**
The reinstatement of the Mexico City Protocol (Global Gag Order), forces foreign organizations to choose between accepting U.S. funding or providing critical access and information on comprehensive reproductive health care to tens of millions of women around the world. In the past, this has forced clinics to close and has severely limited access to contraceptives that has resulted in more unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions.
- 7. Forces asylum seekers underground.**
The EO's force refugees, asylum seekers and women and children desperately seeking safety and protection into the shadows, making them extremely vulnerable to traffickers, smugglers, and criminal organizations.
- 8. Cause a ripple effect around the globe.**
The administration's actions set a bad example throughout the world. These actions abandon our commitment and obligations under the refugee convention and other international human obligations. They give license to other countries to follow the U.S.'s lead and close doors to refugees, leaving even more women and children in danger. This not only fails to make America safer, it destabilizes communities globally, leading to more chaos and conflict.

**WOMEN'S
REFUGEE
COMMISSION**
8 West 17th Street
9th Floor, New York, NY 10011
Tel: (212) 693-8100
info@womensrefugeecommission.org
www.womensrefugeecommission.org
For more information, please contact Katherina O'Hara,
Senior Program Officer, Women's Refugee Commission,
at 302.768.8987 or k.o'hara@womensrefugeecommission.org.

Read more:

<https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/rights/gb/1423-8-ways-the-trump-administration-s-executive-orders-harm-refugee-women-and-children>

We Won't Wait: As war ravages Yemen, its women strive to build peace



We Won't Wait: As war ravages Yemen, its women strive to build peace
Conflict in Yemen has left thousands dead, millions homeless or hungry, and an economy in ruins. But hopes for peace talks are fading and a new approach is needed. Women and girls are particularly affected by the conflict and have a crucial role to play in building peace at the local level. Despite some efforts to assist them, women are not receiving enough practical support and diplomatic commitment. Such backing is necessary to bridge the gap between local, national and international peace talks. This is essential for a viable and inclusive peace process that yields lasting results.

Read more:

<http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/we-wont-wait-as-war-ravages-yemen-its-women-strive-to-build-peace-620182>

Civil society-led Emergency Preparedness for Women with Disabilities in Gaza



Gaza has long been a place of desperate need, with huge challenges in all areas of civic life. Devastating escalations in violence not only destroy lives and infrastructure, but also hope and aspiration. In the midst of this, the most marginalized people are often ignored or forgotten. As part of the *Within and Without the State* programme, community researchers worked with women with disabilities to enable them to devise a plan for periods of crisis. This included strengthening emergency preparedness, coordinating assistance, ensuring shelters are disability-friendly and supporting long-term advocacy for women with disabilities.

Read more:

<http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/civil-society-led-emergency-preparedness-for-women-with-disabilities-in-gaza-620175>

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