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NEWS & ARTICLES

GENDER ACTIVISM

Campaign aims to enhance female health staff's status in Lebanon

An awareness campaign aimed at ending discrimination against female health staff in Lebanon was launched under the patronage of the Social Affairs Ministry. The campaign, entitled “In Safe Hands,” is aimed at ending both physical and verbal harassment and other discriminatory treatment experienced by women in the health sector. It is part of a three-and-a-half-year project to enhance the working conditions and status of female medical staff, run by NGO Amel, which hopes to encourage more women to work in the medical field. Research conducted during the project, which was funded by a 793,000-euro (\$972,000) grant from the EU, in coordination with Italian NGO CESTAS, revealed that poor investment in women was to the detriment of economic growth. To read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Jul-19/181112-campaign-aims-to-enhance-female-health-staffs-status.ashx#ixzz21SkYyf1M>



Lebanese Activists slam government inaction over women's rights

Women's rights campaigners voiced their frustration over the government's inaction over key issues, namely equal citizenship rights and protection from domestic violence. At a news conference held jointly by the “My Nationality is a Right for Me and My Family” and the “National Alliance for Legalizing the Protection of Women from Family Violence” campaigns, organizers spoke of what they called the systematic neglect of citizens' rights.

“Lebanon's women want to hold the government accountable for its neglect of their daily rights and for the continued alienation of their causes from national interests,” said Lina Abou Habib, coordinator of the nationality campaign.

Nationality campaigners handed a draft law to Prime Minister Najib Mikati on the issue last July, and this March, for the first time, it was addressed by Cabinet, and a ministerial committee formed.



However, the committee has yet to meet, and Abou Habib believes the president of the board has no intention of calling a meeting any time soon. Currently, if a woman has children with a non-Lebanese citizen, they cannot pass on their nationality, making it difficult for them to receive social benefits such as education and health care. The ministerial committee is headed by Deputy Prime Minister Samir Moqbel, and also includes Interior Minister Marwan Charbel, Justice Minister Shafik Qortbawi and Social Affairs Minister Wael Abu Faour. There are no women in the 30-member Cabinet.

While admitting that the national “political and security situation is tense, and the demands of daily life are stressful,” Abou Habib added that “this issue is also urgent.”

Members of the committee have admitted that the topic has been sidelined, which revealed a pervasive patriarchal attitude, Abou Habib said. “The fact that the committee has not yet met is a sign in itself of the ongoing attitude of excluding women’s issues from the national agenda.” Nationality campaigners have also organised a sit-in in front of Moqbel’s office, to demand he calls a meeting and for increased transparency over the workings of the committee.

Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Jul-17/180854-activists-slam-government-inaction-over-womens-rights.ashx#ixzz21SlA4owm>

Lebanese Female demonstrators take on active roles at Assir sit-in in Saida

It’s been a week since Sheikh Ahmad Assir and his supporters began occupying the Sidon highway. Since then, the demonstrators, who are protesting Hezbollah’s weapons, have set up tents, bathrooms and places to perform wudou, the Muslim ablution, as well as separate tents and prayer areas for female supporters. Dozens of women, almost all of them wearing the niqab, the full facial covering, and long black dresses, are taking part in the demonstration.



Sitting next to each other in one tent, the women type on their Blackberries and iPhones to stay in touch with family.

“We left our home for justice and dignity and in order to seek a drastic solution to the issue of [Hezbollah’s] arms,” says Amal Shamseddine, Assir’s wife.

“We stay in touch with our parents and they visit us,” she says.

“I’m prepared to stay here until our demands are met,” she adds.

Assir, who has said that he won’t back down to public pressure, is expected to deliver the Friday sermon at the sit-in, which could reveal his plans for the demonstration.

Umm Mohammad, another protester, says there are committees for the protest, with both men and women participating. The women, however, pass along their thoughts and ideas for consideration through their husbands, fathers or sons. “We receive directions and carry them out and we give our input as well,” says Shamseddine. “Our men respect women. My husband tells me that Islam and the Quran ... hold men and women as equals in everything and that many Quranic verses mention women as mothers and wives and say that they have rights like men,” she continues. “We stand by our men in sickness and in health.” At this point, Shamseddine calls the women to prayers, which are performed in a large area blocked off by a curtain. Pizza, hamburgers and fried chicken are delivered regularly to the tents, where the food is distributed among the protesters.

Many of the women bring their domestic helpers along to care for their children, but the workers don’t have to take part in sit-in activities, “I’m here with my children. I don’t see

them often because there's so much to be done here and my wife is taking part," says Sheikh Youssef Hneineh. "We and women cooperate with each other. The women have their own work to do. They have complete freedom within bounds of Islamic Shariah, the most important of which is not to mix with strangers [men who are not related by blood]," says Hneineh, who has not returned to his home since the first day of the sit-in. "I love to play here because it's a big place and no one yells at us and there's nothing to break," says his daughter, Hadil, who is playing with her friends. There are toys, including plastic guns and board games, for the children. Rima Shaaban says that people support different causes, but the sit-in is important for her and the other women. "It has done some harm and changed the day-to-day lives of people, but all that will fade. What's important is that the sit-in achieves its goals," she says. "We monitor the news and correct media reports that are mistaken. We also encourage people to join us on Facebook and What's App," she says, explaining how the women contribute to the effort. "I apologize to people if we've caused them harm, but the biggest harm is illegitimate weapons. We here are not infringing on people's freedom or public or private interests," says Maysa Sabbagh. Sabbagh, who has a master's in Islamic Studies and has taken time off work to participate in the sit-in, says one of her roles at the demonstration is to keep the area clean. "Cleanliness is godliness and it's at the core of our beliefs," agrees Umm Mustapha, who also helps clean. "The men do the largest amount of the cleaning and we help," she adds. "Our men respect us and have consideration for our feelings; it's not like how people say that we're slaves to men. "Yes, we obey them as God has ordained," she adds. Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Jul-06/179518-female-demonstrators-take-on-active-roles-at-assir-sit-in.ashx#ixzz21Stlzwgc>

Making men partners in the mission for gender equality in Lebanon

A real man is strong - he can recognize and express his emotions, and, yes, he may even cry. By establishing a men's center to examine masculinity in Lebanese society and provide men with a place to talk about their stresses and needs, the Abaad Resource Center for Gender Equality hopes to help men become partners in addressing issues such as domestic violence and achieving a more equal society. Too often, discussions about domestic abuse or women's empowerment sideline or even demonize men, says Anthony Keedi, manager of the center, established with International Medical Corps.



"One reason there has been such resistance from men toward women's human rights initiatives is because of a lack of targeting men as a demographic and understanding the gender roles that have also been dictated upon men as well as women," he adds.

Keedi explains that commonly in the field of gender rights activists "seem to not address men at all or address men as the aggressors, or as having a negative or evil intent."

A central goal of the men's center, he says, is to "allow men to begin to see their own gender roles and how it has worked against them."

"One very crucial part of the masculine gender role is about emotional expression or lack thereof. Men are not expected to seek help. In fact, they are a population where help-seeking behavior is seen as a weakness ... A man should have the solutions, a man should

fight, a man should be strong and not let these things affect him. Speaking from a psychological point of view, that's not characteristic of human nature - it's human to be able to mourn or be able to cry or communicate," Keedi insists. In addition to workshops on stress and anger management, the center, located in Furn al-Shubbak, offers individual psychological counseling to help men reconsider the way they address problems in the home or daily stresses. The service is free, completely private and confidential. One common stress cited by those who have already come to the center is financial pressure, says Keedi. While financial and work problems will be ever-present, the center's work is to show ways to cope, rather than taking their frustrations home with them and further compounding their problems by creating discordance in their family. "One problem can lead to problems at home, which will lead to feeling even more isolated, even more stressed, even more anxious," Keedi says, which can, in some cases, "lead to violence or a psychological state where the man is unhappy and others around him are unhappy." Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Jul-06/179515-making-men-partners-in-the-mission-for-gender-equality.ashx#ixzz21Sty8ZCq>

20 women protest in front of the Lebanese parliament Vingt femmes « s'écroulent » devant le Parlement libanais

Un flashmob pour dénoncer le travail de la sous-commission parlementaire chargée d'étudier une loi contre la violence domestique. Mardi 10 juillet, place de l'Etoile, Beyrouth. Une vingtaine de jeunes femmes parviennent, l'une après l'autre, à traverser le cordon sécuritaire établi autour du Parlement où une sous-commission présidée par le député Samir Jisr étudie une loi controversée contre la violence domestique. Il est 11h30. Dans un geste synchronisé, les



femmes « s'écroulent » par terre, devant le Parlement. Elles restent allongées le temps de quelques photos avant de se relever et de quitter les lieux. Par ce flashmob symbolique, ces militantes féministes ont voulu marquer un coup médiatique pour dénoncer le travail de la sous-commission parlementaire réunie. En juin, deux membres de la sous-commission, le député des Forces libanaises, Chant Chinchinian, le député du bloc parlementaire du Changement et de la Réforme, Nabil Nicolas, ont claqué la porte de cette même sous-commission. Les deux députés dénonçaient, entre autres, la détermination de ladite sous-commission à maintenir les changements opérés sur la version originale du projet de loi le vidant de son sens, comme l'avait, à plusieurs reprises, dénoncé la Coalition nationale pour la promulgation d'une loi protégeant la femme de la violence domestique. Suite aux changements survenus, le projet de loi ne concerne plus uniquement la femme libanaise, mais englobe tous les membres de la famille victimes de violences domestiques. De plus, la sous-commission parlementaire a maintenu l'article 26 selon lequel « la femme peut porter les cas de violence conjugale et familiale devant les tribunaux civils, uniquement dans le cas où les tribunaux religieux le permettraient ». To watch the video please follow the link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ym5fmez_WMs&feature=plcp

After clashes, Lebanon's majority and civil society steps up for peace and security

In recent days, the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli has been the site of highly publicised clashes between diverse political and sectarian groups. However while this small minority

battles, the majority of Lebanese citizens are standing up against violence - both online and on the ground. Soon after the clashes began, Lebanese civil society activists condemned the spread of violence through Facebook, Twitter and blogs. Their calls for national unity and to disarm the city circulated online in record time. Building on this public support, activists created new social media pages - many of which gathered over a thousand members. These ordinary Lebanese citizens are standing up to show that they reject violence, that they are organising to stop it and that, ultimately, they refuse to be silent. The Facebook group "Tripoli without weapons!" posted an appeal to local and national authorities that read, "...We are citizens who condemn the proliferation of weapons in the neighbourhoods and streets of our city Tripoli. We implore the state and all political, executive, security and military authorities to take whatever steps necessary to rid Tripoli of the weapons circulating through it. Yes to a weapon-free Tripoli!". Following this appeal, many key individuals declared a city-wide strike to protest the violence that had claimed several lives, and held a demonstration in front of Tripoli's public administration offices to raise awareness of their cause. Demonstrators waved Lebanese flags, sang the national anthem and demanded an immediate response to the city's problems of rampant poverty and a lack of security, which are seen as interrelated. They called on the state to provide better security and reiterated the need for street militias to disarm. The non-violent protest brought together the President of the Municipal Council, members of parliament from the region, as well as leaders from all faith groups and other members of civil society. Their message was clear: Lebanon needs to return to the rule of law and provide security for all, throughout the country. With the sectarian strife dividing Tripoli, and fearing that the country as a whole is heading once more towards violence, other civil society activists responded quickly through multiple initiatives, this time in Beirut. Online, youth showed their patriotism with pictures they created in response to the situation, with captions that read: "Neither Sunni nor Shiite, nor Christian, nor Druze, but Lebanese." "Our union is our salvation" was another slogan activists displayed on the steps of the National Museum in Beirut, where white chairs with the names of victims of the recent violence, unnamed chairs with Lebanese flags, and a large sign reading "That's enough!" all begged for a return to peace. In addition, scholars formed online groups to say no to war in Lebanon. The Third Voice for Lebanon is one example of a non-partisan, non-denominational and apolitical grassroots online group which publishes and circulates texts that protest violence and cronyism, as well as the recruitment and the indoctrination of children into militias and extremist groups. It uses peaceful demonstrations in Lebanon and overseas to say no to violence and yes to peace. Lebanese civil society is calling upon the state to take firm action against violence and the circulation of weapons in poor areas by establishing security and supporting sustainable development that can help end the poverty that drives violence. The hurdles Lebanon faces now are very real. But these collective actions by Lebanon's diverse, multifaceted civil society demonstrate hope. This article was written for the Common Ground News Service (CGNews). To read more follow the link www.ritachemaly.wordpress.com.



Palestinian women battle to break into business

From corner fruit stalls in Hebron to chic Ramallah ballet studios, Palestinian women are making their mark in business, some out of necessity and others looking to break the gender

mould and pursue a dream. For Shyrine Ziadeh, a 24-year-old Birzeit University graduate, that dream was to open a dance studio. Now the proud owner of the Ramallah Ballet Center, the first in the West Bank, her sunny, top-floor studio is flooded with classical music and mirrors stretching from wall to wall. Little girls plie in pink ballet shoes and jump over fairy wings. "I want to develop girls," she said. "Ballet helps develop their point of view in life. We need such things in Palestine." Latest statistics from the International Labor Organization estimated that in 2008-2009, women headed just 5 percent of West Bank firms. Circumstantial evidence suggests the figure has climbed since then, fueled by economic growth and an increasing appetite for bank lending.



However, the deeply traditional, male-dominated society that is prevalent across much of the Arab world, coupled with bureaucratic restraints unique to the Israeli-

occupied West Bank, pose particular challenges for women seeking to get ahead.

"Many women in the West Bank want to do things, but they can't. Our culture is generally more of a man's culture. Women are trying to do things, but in small steps," said Ziadeh.

Restrictions from Israel, which controls all entry points to the West Bank, only add to the problems, she said. "Because of the occupation, we need a permit to do anything," she said, pointing to the difficulty of importing leotards and other ballet garb not available in the West Bank, for example. Although the odds are not in their favour, the outlook for women is improving in the cities, if not yet in the poorer, hidebound villages that dot the arid territory. Women's literacy and employment rates are rising. Female police units are integrating into West Bank forces, and women make up a quarter of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's cabinet. To read more : <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Jul-11/180217-palestinian-women-battle-to-break-into-business.ashx#ixzz21SpUm5ij>

Egypt women speak up against sexual violence

Egyptian women are speaking up against sexual violence after harrowing tales of mob attacks in Cairo's iconic Tahrir Square prompted initiatives to combat the "epidemic."

Surrounded by volunteers to protect them, dozens of women took to the street on Friday to demand a "safe Tahrir," as part of a series of events aimed at raising awareness.

"We want to be treated as citizens, not females," said Rasha Kamel, a 38-year-old gynecologist and a protest organizer, as she wrote on a large piece of cardboard "I am like your sister" in a thick black marker.

On Cairo's streets, sexual harassment of women, regardless of whether or not they wear an Islamic headscarf, is common in the form of obscenities, touching or groping.

But an increase in accounts from Tahrir of mob attacks and sexual violence against women have raised the alarm.

On February 11, 2011, as hundreds of thousands were celebrating president Hosni Mubarak's downfall after an 18-day uprising, Lara Logan -- a reporter with U.S. news channel CBS-- was attacked by 200 to 300 men who raped her "with their hands."

Later in November, a French journalist working for public television channel France 3 said she had been violently beaten and sexually assaulted while covering the protests.

Caroline Sinz told AFP she was "beaten by a group of youngsters and adults who tore my clothes" and then molested her in a way that "would be considered rape."

The two incidents put a spotlight on sexual assaults in this conservative Muslim country, but failed to trigger any reaction from authorities.

On June 2, a young foreign women described her ordeal to Nazra, a Cairo-based women's rights group.

"My pant was pulled down by the many men and they raped me with their dirty fingers ... The men were like lions around a dead piece of meat and their hands were all over my body and under my destroyed clothes," she said.

Several days later, a group of men attacked a women's march against sexual harrassment in Tahrir Square, assaulting several of the protesters.

Days later yet again, British journalism student Natasha Smith wrote on her blog that she too had been the victim of a sexual attack in the square.

Many believe that the recurring pattern of the attacks and the fact they often take place in the same part of the massive Tahrir Square point to the fact they are premeditated.

These attacks "are calculated and organized to scare women and chase them away from the public sphere, punishing women for their participation," according to Nazra.

Ahmed Niazy, one of the men who joined Friday's protest in solidarity, believes "the regime, which never fell, uses sexual harassment to repress freedom of expression."

It "believes women are a weakness, and it's a way of putting pressure on us. They have managed to taint the square," Niazy told AFP. "How many times have I not gone to Tahrir because I don't want to feel hands all over my thighs?" said Nana al-Hariri, 22. Women have staged protests, formed human chains in main Cairo thoroughfares holding signs against harassment and conducted online campaigns against what many call an "epidemic."

Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Jul-07/179740-egypt-women-speak-up-against-sexual-violence.ashx#ixzz21SqEQEfh>

Libya's women politicians seize chance in vote

Majdah al-Fallah flashes a broad smile and pumps the hands of shoppers in downtown Tripoli as she meets potential voters on the campaign trail ahead of Libya's landmark national assembly elections Saturday.

A doctor by trade who lived in Ireland for years, Fallah is running for the Justice and Construction Party, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is tipped to do well. But her small team of election helpers often find the going tough.

"Sometimes when I give out the flyer some people reject it or take it and then rip it up in front of me because there are women on it," said Huthaifa al-Harram, a 20-year-old male backer of Fallah and another female candidate on the same ticket.

"People say, 'I don't think women should play a role in the government - they don't know what to do,'" he added.

Coming less than a year after an uprising ended four decades of autocratic rule by Moammar Gadhafi, the vote will be the North African state's first nationwide exercise in democracy for 60 years.



The election will determine the makeup of a national assembly, which will in turn appoint a prime minister and Cabinet ahead of full general elections under a newly drafted constitution to be staged next year.

Yet while election rules mean that Fallah and other female candidates have guaranteed places on party lists, a strong current of social and religious conservatism means their role in politics is still questioned by many Libyans.

In both Tripoli and Benghazi, the second city that was the launchpad of the uprising, the faces of female candidates on dozens of posters have even been slashed or spray-painted out. Gadhafi's famed appearances at foreign summits flanked by female bodyguards may have projected an image of empowered women as pillars of his rule. But in reality women have a fragile place in a Libyan society that is resolutely patriarchal.

"The women I work with tell me they wouldn't vote for a woman, that a man will lead better," said Fatima Gleidan, a 47-year-old woman and teacher who came to hear Fallah campaign. Attitudes like that suggest Libya may emulate other "Arab Spring" countries, where women who marched side-by-side with men to oust entrenched dictators have since been sidelined. In Egypt, the percentage of female parliamentarians even fell from 12 percent before the overthrow of longtime leader Hosni Mubarak to 2 percent after the last parliamentary elections, a study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union found.

In Tunisia, the picture for women is more mixed. Quotas mean that 30 percent of assembly members are female, but local rights groups complain that women ended up with less than a handful of posts in a transitional Cabinet of over 40 ministers.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union report estimates that women make up just 10.7 percent of all parliamentarians in the Arab region as a whole last year - making it the only region in the world where female representation was less than 30 percent.

But Fallah the Libyan candidate is undeterred, and says the requirement for parties to alternate the genders on their election lists will allow women to get a crucial first foot in the door of local politics. To read the entire article:

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Jul-07/179660-libyas-women-politicians-seize-chance-in-vote.ashx#ixzz21SqMWTQl>

All-women armed battalion forms in Homs

A group of women claiming to be from the Syrian city of Homs announced this week the formation of the first exclusively female armed organization to fight against the Syrian regime.

"We are a group of women from Homs and we have formed the Banat al-Walid battalion," announced a member of the group in a video posted on the Internet Monday.

The previously unknown group, apparently named after Khaled bin al-Walid, a companion of the Muslim Prophet Mohammad and a renowned military commander, said it was not affiliated with any other military organization.



The speaker, who spoke on behalf of around 10 other veiled women appearing in the video, said the battalion's aim is to "help the wounded and refugees wherever they are, to train women to use various types of weapons to protect themselves from [President Bashar] Assad's gangs, and to monitor the regime's crimes and ensure they are published and

exposed in the media.” She said the reasons behind the formation of the group were repeated violations against Syrians in general and women in particular, the expulsion of residents, and “sniper attacks by the Shabbiha, Iranian mercenaries and Hezbollah elements despite the presence of U.N. monitors.” Hezbollah has denied allegations that its members are fighting alongside Syrian military forces in Lebanon’s neighbor. Earlier this week, a report from Human Rights Watch indicated that Syrian government forces have used rape and other forms of sexual violence against men, women and children during the Syrian uprising. The organization stated that it had recorded 20 incidents of sexual violence, gleaned from interviews conducted inside and outside Syria with eight victims, including four women, and more than 25 other people with knowledge of sexual abuse - including medical workers, former detainees, army defectors and women’s rights activists. Human Rights Watch’s Middle East director, Sarah Leah Whitson, said that “the assaults are not limited to the detention facilities - government forces and pro-government shabiha militia members have also sexually assaulted women and girls during home raids and residential sweeps.” Syria denies targeting civilians, blaming their deaths on “armed terrorist groups” and foreign-backed fighters who seek to topple Assad. Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Jun-22/177790-all-women-armed-battalion-forms-in-homs.ashx#ixzz21SyOROMg>

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Lebanese tattooist to face jail time and lashes in Saudi Arabia

A court in the Saudi Arabian city of Jeddah has sentenced an unidentified Lebanese man to one year in prison and 200 lashes after he was found guilty of tattooing the bodies of Saudi women and working as a women’s hairdresser, a Saudi newspaper said Tuesday. Al-Madina newspaper reported that the district court had also fined the man.

The article said the Lebanese man, known as “The King of Tattoos,” was arrested when a member of the Squad for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice pretended to be a driver for one of his female clients.

The squad confiscated a bag containing a series of massage oils and beauty lotions: some for weight loss and skin discoloration, as well as other cosmetic products used for breast lifting and enhancement.

They also confiscated artificial eyelashes and products for hair coloring.

The Saudi paper said that when the man was arrested, he told the squad that he used these products as part of his work in Lebanon as a hairdresser, denying that he used them on Saudi women.

During the subsequent investigation, police found text messages on his cellular phone from women indicating that he had tattooed their bodies at their residence.

They discovered pictures of tattooed women in his possession, as well as business cards the Lebanese used to distribute among clients.

According to the paper, the investigation revealed that the man had been working in Saudi Arabia as a hairdresser and tattoo artist for nine years, entering the country on commercial visas.

He reportedly began receiving women in a rented apartment before later starting to go to women’s houses under the belief that this would make him safer.

Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Jul-18/180966-lebanese-tattooist-to-face-jail-time-and-lashes-in-saudi-arabia.ashx#ixzz21SkxeUAI>

Protection of women: A matter of dispute in Lebanon

Civil society activists and the Lebanese Forces have criticized changes to a draft law intended to protect women from domestic violence, after the parliamentary subcommittee discussing the draft rephrased it to address families rather than women.

The Women's rights group KAFA (Enough Violence & Exploitation) and the LF said Wednesday that lawmakers in the subcommittee are shifting the law's focus from women to the family.

The committee decided to change the title of the bill from "protecting women from family violence" to "protecting the entire family from violence, based on what it has called constitutional grounds.

Earlier this week, the LF's representative on the committee, Zahle MP Shant Janjanian, quit the talks in protest against the amendments. But Metn MP Ghassan Moukheiber, a member of the committee, told The Daily Star it would be unconstitutional for the law to address only women. "We cannot rule out the fact that they themselves [women] can exercise certain forms of violence against men," Moukheiber said. "I understand that it is rare to find violence by women against men, but [such cases] do exist," he said. Moukheiber criticized KAFA and the LF for their recent campaign against the committee, calling it counterproductive and their accusations "baseless." "Unfortunately there is a tendency to assume that whatever this committee does will be a failure for women's rights ... when in reality we have improved the tools of the law and made them effective for protecting women," Moukheiber added.



But Janjanian fired back, saying that domestic violence is mainly against women, because it is rooted in a structure of male-female domination. He called marital rape, which was criminalized in the bill and removed by the committee, one way of perpetuating this domination. To read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Jun-15/176907-protection-of-women-a-matter-of-dispute.ashx#ixzz21SyaFUdF>

No running, no diving and no migrants at Lebanon's beach clubs

Lebanese Beaches have come under fire for their discriminatory policies against migrant workers banning them from swimming in the pools like regular customers.

The Anti Racism Movement (ARM) of Lebanon posted a video entitled "Flat Out Segregation at Lebanese Beaches part II". The video features members of the movement calling ten popular beach clubs while pretending to be inquisitive customers wanting to bring along their household helpers for a day at the pool. They asked them two questions. "Are migrant workers allowed to enter your establishment?" and, "Are they allowed to swim?" Nine out of the ten beaches said they allowed the migrant workers to enter along with a Lebanese customer but not to swim.



These clubs were Golden Beach, Oceana, Miramar, Long Beach, Edde Sands, Florida Beach, Portemilio, Cyan, La Plage, and Las Salinas. For the most part, the club administration blamed their other customers, stating that "it doesn't come from us, there are customers who wont accept it." Others simply referred to club policy saying that "it is forbidden". The callers were persistent, and in

some cases even questioned the club administrators about the recent Ministry of Tourism decree banning discrimination at beaches. When cornered, one club staff member said, “yes, well, nothing has changed here, she can come in no problem, but she can’t swim.” This is not the first time ARM has stirred controversy relating to the popular beach resorts. [Part one](#) of their video series on segregation at Lebanese beaches featured an Ethiopian woman being refused entry at Saint Georges beach club. The landmark institution is caught on tape as it lets in a Lebanese man just seconds after rejecting the woman. One of the beaches phoned proved itself to be different. When questioned, a staff member at Zahrat Khayrazan shouted, “Of course she can swim, isn’t she a human being just like me or you habibi?” to read more and see the videos please follow the links <http://www.antiracismmovement.com/2012/07/no-running-no-diving-and-no-migrants-at.html> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0ZXvPNxbl&feature=plcp>

After stating that No Saudi women were qualified for Olympics...

Saudi Arabia: A Saudi-owned newspaper says no women from the ultraconservative Muslim kingdom have qualified to compete at the London Games. A report in the pan-Arab daily newspaper Al-Sharq al-Awsat - an important media tool for Saudi rulers - says Saudi male athletes have qualified to compete in track, equestrian and weightlifting at the games that start in less than three weeks. There is no "female team taking part in the three fields," the report said, quoting an anonymous Saudi official. He said no female athlete had taken part in qualifying events in Saudi Arabia, which severely restricts women in public life. Saudi leaders have been under pressure to end the practice of sending all-male teams to international competitions. They could face IOC sanctions after the London Games if women are excluded from the country's Olympic team. The Saudi embassy in London said in a statement two weeks ago that women who qualify will be allowed to compete. Last week, IOC President Jacques Rogge said he remains optimistic that the Gulf kingdom will send women to the games for the first time.



Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Sports/Olympics/2012/Jul-09/179921-report-no-saudi-women-qualified-for-olympics.ashx#ixzz21SnKbNaW>

... Saudis to send 2 women to London Games

LONDON: Every country competing at the London Games will include female athletes for the first time in Olympic history after Saudi Arabia agreed to send two women to compete in judo and track and field.

The move by the ultraconservative Muslim kingdom to break with its practice of fielding male-only teams followed earlier decisions by Qatar and Brunei to send women athletes to the Olympics for the first time.

"With Saudi Arabian female athletes now joining their fellow female competitors from Qatar and Brunei, it means that by London



2012 every national Olympic committee will have sent women to the Olympic Games," IOC President Jacques Rogge said.

Saudi Arabia had been under intense pressure from the International Olympic Committee and human-rights groups to include female athletes. Thursday's announcement followed months of IOC negotiations with the Saudis to bring women to London.

The two female Saudi competitors are Wodjan Ali Seraj Abdulrahim Shahrkhani in judo and 800-meter runner Sarah Attar. "A big inspiration for participating in the Olympic Games is being one of the first women for Saudi Arabia to be going," the 17-year-old Attar said in an IOC video from her U.S. training base in San Diego. "It's such a huge honor and I hope that it can really make some big strides for women over there to get more involved in sport."

Attar, who has spent most of her life outside of Saudi Arabia, said she hopes her inclusion will encourage women in the conservative kingdom that does not even allow women to drive to participate in sports. "To any woman who wants to participate, I say 'go for it,' and don't let anybody hold you back," Attar said in the video after running a lap on the track wearing pants and a headscarf. "We all have potential to get out there and get moving," she said, speaking in an American accent. Women in Saudi Arabia bear the brunt of their nation's deeply conservative values. They are often the target of the unwanted attention of the kingdom's intrusive religious police, who enforce a rigid interpretation of Islamic law.

There are no written laws that prohibit women from participating in sports, but women are not allowed into stadiums, and they cannot rent athletic venues. There is no physical education for girls in public schools, and no women-only hours at swimming pools.

Women cannot register for sports clubs, league competitions and other female-only tournaments with the government. They are banned from entering all-male national trials, which makes it impossible for them to qualify for international competitions, including the Olympics. Attar and Shahrkhani were entered for the London Games by the Saudi Arabian Olympic Committee by Monday's deadline. Read more:

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/2012/Jul-12/180319-saudis-to-send-2-women-to-london-games.ashx#ixzz21SnXyAPV>

... And Qatari female athlete to hold flag at London Games

One of Qatar's first female athletes to compete at the Olympics will be the flag-bearer for the opening ceremony at the London Games.

Qatar's Olympic Committee posted a statement late Wednesday on Twitter saying shooter Bahiya al-Hamad has been chosen to "raise the Qatar flag at London 2012."

"I'm truly proud and humbled to carry the Qatar flag among my fellow athletes from all over the world," al-Hamad said on Twitter. Along with Saudi Arabia and Brunei, Qatar has never previously sent female athletes to the Olympics. The tiny but wealthy oil-rich nation of Qatar has made women's participation in sports a key component of its quest to become a Middle Eastern sporting power by bidding for high-profile competitions, such as winning the rights to host the 2022 football World Cup. Al-Hamad was Qatar's most successful athlete at the 2011 Arab Games, winning three gold medals and two silver. The International Olympic Committee offered the 19-year-old shooter a wild-card invitation to compete in the 10-



-meter and women's air rifle competition at the London Games. Qatari female swimmer Nada Arkaji and sprinter Noor al-Malki have also been given wild cards by the IOC. The flag-bearer announcement follows reports that Saudi Arabia - Qatar's bigger and more influential neighbor - has reversed its pledge to send female athletes to the Olympics. Read more:

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Sports/Olympics/2012/Jul-12/180328-qatari-female-athlete-to-hold-flag-at-london-games.ashx#ixzz21SpAaLx4>

Single female Emiratis over 30: spinsters?

If you are a 30-year-old Emirati woman and still single, then you've have missed the marriage boat. By UAE standards, you are now considered to be an old maid.

The problem, authorities in the Gulf state say, is that more and more women fall into this category: some 60 percent, according to the latest statistics, raising concerns among officials and sparking online debates as to why. The issue has been the focus of discussions for weeks at the Federal National Council, the country's appointed consultative body, where members are scrambling to find a solution to what they believe could be a serious demographic problem. "This is very worrying," FNC member Said al-Kitbi told AFP, adding that there are now more than 175,000 Emirati women who are over 30 and unmarried.



Though he conceded that being a "spinster" is "not a bad thing in itself," he argues that the demographic consequences of these women not having children is the real problem.

The United Arab Emirates is home to more than 8 million people, only 950,000 of them UAE citizens. The rest are foreign, and young Emirati men are increasingly choosing to marry them instead. The latest government statistics show that at least 20 percent of UAE men are marrying non-Emiratis. The reasons behind this growing spinsterhood are not entirely clear. UAE Planning Ministry statistics show that in 1995, only 20 percent of women over 30 were unmarried. By 2008, that figure was 50 percent. Some evidence suggests that excessively high dowries are preventing men without the means from choosing a spouse. The latest survey by the UAE Marriage Fund, a government institution that provides financial assistance to those who want to marry but cannot afford to, showed that 87 percent of respondents blamed high dowries for low marriage rates. To Read more:

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Lifestyle/2012/Jul-03/179102-single-female-emiratis-over-30-spinsters.ashx#ixzz21Srwt8Db>

Rape as Weapon of Terror in Syria

A woman swathed in black squares her shoulders and calmly looks into a camera. She holds a Quran. Only a sliver of her face—her eyeglasses—shows. "What happened to me hasn't happened to anyone, or if it has affected anyone else I do not know," she says. "But I will speak and let all the people know what [Syrian leader] Bashar al-Assad and his men are doing." Over the next four minutes, her breathing grows labored and her voice breaks as she describes how, in May 2011, five men wearing black entered her home on the outskirts of Homs and raped her.



“This is my message to the world,” she says. “Let all the world hear what is happening to us. And I might not be the first one nor the last who was treated in this way.”

The still-unidentified woman posted the video to YouTube on February 11, 2012. It is one of the earliest reports on our live, crowd-sourced map of sexualized violence in Syria. The Women’s Media Center project Women Under Siege has been collecting reports out of Syria for three months, during which time we’ve seen many stories similar to this, in which multiple attackers, usually government forces, are said to gang rape a woman in her home. We have also mapped stories at the extreme edge of nightmares; of teenage girls given shots that immobilize them while their genitals were burned or filled with mice. Government forces and others appear to be carrying out appalling sexualized attacks against women, men, and children in Syria as the conflict there continues. Although we are unable to independently confirm these stories—Syria is simply too dangerous, and our research staff too small—they are consistent both internally and within the news and NGO reports telling similar stories from the Syrian conflict. To read more: http://www.wunrn.com/news/2012/07_12/07_09/070912_syria.htm

GENDER & HUMAN RIGHTS

MEA’s only female pilot in Lebanon, still in man’s uniform after 16 years

What began as a joke, an attempt to disprove her friend’s misogynistic comments, led to Rola Hoteit becoming the first and only female pilot in the history of Middle East Airlines.

Having never even flown in a plane before, Hoteit, then a mathematics student at the American University of Beirut, challenged her friend to a competition after he dismissed a newspaper advert by the airline that called for “[female and male] applicants” for pilot positions.

“He was making fun, saying that women don’t know how to do anything, that they can hardly fry an egg. Eventually I got very angry,” Hoteit says.

As an indignant 18-year-old she wanted to prove that women could do anything men could do. “Finally we decided we would both apply, to see who would pass the exam.

“It was just a joke. I wasn’t really applying to be a pilot - I had never been on a plane before,” she says. Over 2,000 students applied, with 600 going through to the written exam. Only nine passed this section, including Hoteit. Her male friend did not get through.

“After I passed the exam, I started to think, maybe I don’t want to finish my math major, and I don’t want to become a teacher - I want to go, I want to fly.”

After this revelation, Hoteit went home to south Lebanon to tell her parents of her change of heart. “My dad was very angry,” she says. “I had always been a grade A student - during my sophomore year I was the first among all the Lebanese universities in Arts and Sciences. So he thought I should do a Ph.D. - he had a bigger dreams for me.”

Determined to become a pilot, Hoteit returned to Beirut, withdrew from her courses, and left her dorm. “I told my dad, ‘Either I go and fly, or I will stay here at home: I am not going back to university.’” After that, her father could see no way to stop her.

Sixteen years after completing her training, Hoteit remains MEA’s only female pilot. Her father is proud of her achievements now; her mother, formerly a math teacher, was supportive from the beginning. “She said, ‘This is your dream so go ahead and do it.’ To read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Jul-19/181107-meas->



What the World Does Not Know about Us... a text from a Lebanese young activist

“I want to make one thing clear: we women in Lebanon are NOT victims. Our tenacity and resilience, which we have gained through our own process of self-empowerment, allow us to continue waging a battle against patriarchy, which exists across the world and in many different religious contexts.”

In 2010, the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism made a series of ads to encourage people to come to Lebanon as tourists. One of these ads shows a man remembering his time in Lebanon with flashbacks of girls wearing bikinis, dancing and enjoying summer, the beach, and the partying. I did not start by telling you this small story at random— I am telling it to make a point.



For a country with an economy that depends heavily on tourism, such touristic ads are a very smart move that I would not object to...*if* they didn't objectify women, using our bodies as a product of profit, and most importantly, *if* we women in Lebanon really did have the rights such media portray, and *if* we women in this country actually had all of the basic rights they are entitled to as human beings.

To the world, Lebanon is one of the most progressive countries in the Middle East, especially in the area of women's rights. This is because we are perceived as a democratic country where women have the right to vote, where we can drive, wear bikinis, and work. But, sadly, what the world does not know is that these are the only rights women have in Lebanon, a country that is not in fact a democracy. Rather, it is a sectarian dictatorship built upon the fears of some 18 monotheistic religious groups.

What define a progressive society in the midst of a patriarchal world, to me, are human rights. What the media and the Ministry of Tourism always forget to tell the world—what they hide—is the fact that Lebanon is equally conservative to most of our patriarchal counterparts around the world. Our only difference is that we know how to hide it, sugarcoat it, and cover it up by only showing the extremes of our progressive side in the media. Yes, we have the right to vote, but we have a sectarian system that swallows us into either electing Members of Parliament (MPs) that our religious sects impose on us, or that our husbands/fathers/brothers follow. We are raised to believe that our place is the kitchen, and politics cannot be discussed while doing the dishes. Moreover, women who run for political positions are usually the daughters or wives of former or existing politicians, and they always adopt the prevailing patriarchal values in dealing with women's issues, and political sectarian issues in general. Yes, we have the right to drive, but every day, whenever a woman is driving, there is a man telling her to go back to the kitchen, or iron his shirt, because she cannot drive well, or a man teaching you how to park when you already know how to do it. Yes, we can wear bikinis (as the ministry of tourism showed in the ad) as long as doing so generates profit, but the reality is we cannot walk in the street with skirts OR veils. Neither will take you to jail, but both will award you with constant sexual harassment, to the extent that you will not even be comfortable to walk in the streets anymore. When a corporation uses women's bodies to make profits, it's totally acceptable, but if a woman decides to express herself, dressing as she pleases, she will be encountered with a lot of sexual harassment. To read more :

<http://www.peacexpeace.org/2012/06/what-the-world-does-not-know-about-us/>

Emiratis want crackdown on women's skimpy dress

With the number of foreigners dwarfing that of locals in her hometown of Abu Dhabi, Asma al-Muhairi has become increasingly anxious at the prospect of her younger nieces abandoning their full-length black robes in favor of Western attire that seems to be everywhere she goes. But it wasn't until the 23-year-old marketing worker came face to face with two scantily-clad female foreigners at one of the many luxury shopping malls in the United Arab Emirates that she decided to take action.



"While going to a mall, I saw two ladies wearing ... I can't say even shorts. It was underwear," said al-Muhairi, whose black abaya - a long garment worn by conservative Gulf women - is offset by a gold Versace watch and egg-shell blue handbag. "Really, they were not shorts," she said. "I was standing and thinking: 'Why is this continuing? Why is it in the mall? I see families. I see kids around.' Failing to persuade the mall to intervene, al-Muhairi and another Emirati woman, Hanan al-Rayes, took to Twitter to air their concerns in May. They were inundated with responses that prompted them to launch a Twitter campaign dubbed (at)UAEDressCode that aims to explore ways to combat the growing number of shoppers in low-cut dresses and hot pants. As the campaign picked up steam, it also has served to symbolize the growing concerns among Emiratis, a tiny minority in their own country. Emirati citizens account for a little more than 10 percent of the 8 million people living in the Gulf nation. Most of the population is made up of Asian, African and Middle Eastern guest workers, as well as Western expatriates living here temporarily. The overall population more than doubled over the past decade as the country embarked on a building boom that transformed Dubai, up the coast from Abu Dhabi, into the Arabian Gulf's financial hub and a popular tourist draw. "I think in an increasingly tumultuous region and in an era of powerful and often intrusive globalizing forces, citizens of the UAE are increasingly concerned that their traditions and core values are being eroded," said Christopher Davidson, an expert on Gulf affairs at Britain's Durham University. "In some senses, it is a grassroots reaction to authorities and leaders that have for many years done little to check this erosion," he added. "We've seen reactions to alcohol, so now we are seeing a reaction to immodest dress."

Jalal Bin Thaneya, an Emirati activist who has embraced the dress code campaign, said it is a way for Emiratis to show they are concerned about the loss of traditions. To continue reading follow the link: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2012/Jul-06/179638-emiratis-want-crackdown-on-womens-skimpy-dress.ashx#ixzz21St7jkWl>

Egyptian women fight on, and discover new allies

One of the iconic images of Egypt's revolution was that of men and women standing together, united for positive change. But since then, women have struggled with sexual harassment and have been side-lined in the political transition. Egyptian women, however, have never stopped fighting - and today they are finding many new allies.

Some Egyptians argue that democracy needs to come first, before worrying about women's rights. Overcoming women's marginalization first, though, is actually essential to creating a truly democratic Egypt. The core issue not only concerns women's equality with men, but also the matter of justice.

All too often, women have been treated as second class citizens and subject to injustice - they face harassment on the street, have been victims of virginity tests by the military, and are shut out of many opportunities to be involved in politics. For instance, women's rights activists are not being consulted in the constitutional drafting process.



Even though women can legally hold positions as judges or high-ranking political offices, social pressure often means women are unable to attain them. However, women's rights activists have not been silent in the face of hurdles like these. Take Bothaina Kamel, who exercised her right to run for president, and was Egypt's first female candidate for the office. Although she ultimately failed to gather enough signatures to be on the ballot, she demonstrated to other Egyptian women that they, too, should be able to participate in politics. When it comes to civil society, many existing feminist organizations have grown in membership, and new feminist organizations have been founded. For instance, the Feminist Union, originally founded in 1923 by activist Hoda Shaarawy, was re-launched in October 2011, bringing together more than 1,000 organizations under its umbrella to focus on supporting women running in the parliamentary elections, as well as encouraging women to vote. Alongside these examples of female activists are also stories of men supporting women. Many liberal members of Parliament, such as Amr Hamzawy, have spoken about the importance of making women's issues a priority. Male support has extended to the grassroots level, too. Over the past year, men have participated in and protected women from harassment during marches organized by women. In addition, projects like Harassmap, which documents and advocates against harassment on the street, and other organizations like it, have male volunteers. The only way to truly achieve women's rights over the long-term is to include women in all decision-making processes - including revising the Constitution. Read more:

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Opinion/Commentary/2012/Jul-13/180422-egyptian-women-fight-on-and-discover-new-allies.ashx#ixzz21SmoWo6s>

Arab states: Plan to Increase Judges' Education on Women's Rights

Plans are underway to educate more Bahraini and Arab judges on women's social and humanitarian rights.

Arab Women Organisation (AWO) director-general Dr Wadooda Badran said efforts were being made to bridge the gap between realising women's rights and enforcing them in the Arab world.

They include amending legislation, conducting awareness campaigns, sponsoring studies, speaking to young students and possibly setting up a women's studies research centre in the region.

Over the last 20 years more rational and liberal judges have come to power, but the judiciary system still needs more reforms to change the mindset of the older generation, added Dr Badran.

"Women in general today don't fight for basic rights as it is a chapter that has been long closed and the Arab world has reached an advanced stage in women's rights that has given women their rightful place amongst the society," she explained.

"On the contrary, even with the emergence of more rational judges that believe in righteousness, women's real powers were being undermined with numerous legislations.

"There is a gap between what's practised and proper rights that women have and it is because systems have not been yet updated to match the ongoing change."

Dr Badran was speaking at the closing ceremony of the Second Women's Humanitarian Rights Conference yesterday at Sofitel Bahrain Zallaq Thalassa Sea and Spa, organised by Supreme Council for Women (SCW) in co-ordination with the AWO.

The two-day event, under the theme Bright Turning Points In Arab Court Verdicts, aimed to highlight the progress of women's rights in courts and recent judgements issued in their favour. To read more follow the link :

<http://www.wluml.org/news/arab-states-plan-increase-judges-education-womens-rights>



RESOURCES & CALLS

ANNOUNCEMENTS

EU project to improve women's prison conditions in Lebanon

An EU-funded project to improve conditions in women's prisons was launched by head of the EU delegation to Lebanon, ambassador Angelina Eichhorst and Gen. Joseph Douaihy, Commander of the Gendarmerie, at Baabda Prison. The 30-month program has been dubbed "Promoting Human Rights Policy and Practice in Lebanese Women's Prisons." It aims at improving the human rights of women detainees in four women's prisons - Baabda, Tripoli, Zahle and Barbar al-Khazen, Beirut - in cooperation with the prisons' authorities, through enhancing the legal and social support to detainees, encouraging them to report abuses and promoting regulatory improvements. It will be implemented by the NGO Diakonia, alongside Caritas, Dar al-Amal and Rassemblement Démocratique des Femmes. During the launch, Eicchorst said: "Prisons should contribute to rehabilitate inmates, to educate and reinsert them into society and to set them on the right path to rejoin society as productive and welcome members." She stressed the high rate of pretrial detention in Lebanese prisons, calling on authorities to do more to improve prison conditions and accelerate trials. Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Jul-04/179299-eu-project-to-improve-womens-prison-conditions.ashx#ixzz21SrFwNAa>

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