



**The Middle East & North Africa  
"Gender and Development E-Brief"  
Issue #128  
January 2013**

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## NEWS & ARTICLES

### GENDER ACTIVISM

**Women's nationality supporters in Lebanon hold sit-in**  
Jinsiyyati (My Nationality), a group promoting citizenship rights for women, held a sit-in near Baabda Palace Thursday 17 January 2013.

The group is protesting a recommendation by a ministerial committee that women continue not to be allowed to pass their citizenship to their family members.

Khaldoun Sharif, an adviser to Prime Minister Najib Mikati, joined the protesters in a show of solidarity, saying Mikati supports their demand. To read more follow the link:

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2013/Jan-18/202726-womens-nationality-supporters-hold-sit-in.ashx#ixzz2ldhamlsN>



### Women Call for Constitution that Provides Gender Equality in Egypt

Egypt's new constitution leaves Dooa Abdallah feeling left out.

"I don't see myself as an Egyptian citizen in this constitution. I don't see my future in this constitution," she said.

Abdallah voted against the proposed constitution and now says it must not be left in its current version. It won't be easy to change, she says, but she hopes to see the text challenged through "legal ways and on the streets."

Abdallah is the Middle East and North Africa regional coordinator for the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKnow Politics) and a board member of an international solidarity network called Women Living Under Muslim Laws. She spoke with Women's eNews in a recent Skype interview from Cairo, where she is based.



Like many Egyptian critics of the ruling Islamist party, she says the new constitution drafted by the Muslim Brotherhood was too rushed and resulted in a document that neither

represents Egyptian society nor challenges the status quo that gripped the country for decades under former-President Hosni Mubarak.

"The text should be reflecting the notions of equality and freedom, but the constitution is now only reflecting the conservative philosophy of the Muslim Brotherhood . . . If we keep the same economic system, if we keep the same political system, if we don't give people their rights, why then was there a revolution and people lost their lives?" she asked.

The Egyptian constitution drafted by the Islamist party, the Muslim Brotherhood, was approved by a two-round referendum on Dec. 22 and signed into law by Egyptian President Mohamed Morsia few days later. The final text removed a clause that specifically guaranteed equality for women in the country and refers only to citizens, saying they are "equal before the law and equal in rights and obligations without discrimination."

Confirmed to Family Sphere

The approved constitution states that honoring women is essential to a dignified nation. However, the text only refers to women as sisters and mothers, speaking of them purely within the framework of family and not offering room for women in the political and societal spheres.

Article 10, which states that family is the basis of society, and is founded on religion, ethics (morality) and patriotism, says the state will provide mother and child services for free and guarantees women access to health, social, economic care, inheritance rights and harmony between her family duties and public life. To read the entire article follow the link <http://womensenews.org/story/law/130112/egyptian-constitution-provides-little-protection>

### **Women's group demands role in electoral debate In Lebanon**

The National Commission for Lebanese Women expressed their concerns over the exclusion of women's rights organizations from the current debate over a new electoral law, the National News Agency reported. In an open letter addressed to Speaker Nabih Berri, the commission demanded that the parliamentary subcommittee meet with the commission members to hear their opinions. The letter said: "We are very concerned over delay in reaching a new electoral law, especially when the issue of women's rights is absent from the entire process that led to a new electoral law." They reminded lawmakers that Lebanon is bound by its constitution and international agreements to respect women's rights. To read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/Jan-10/201603-womens-group-demands-role-in-electoral-debate.ashx#ixzz2ldl2TzOi>

### **GENDER BASED VIOLENCE**

#### **Syrian Women & Girls Suffer Sexual Violence, Rape, Torture in Civil War**

Rape is a "significant and disturbing" feature of the Syrian civil war, with women and girls citing sexual violence as their main reason for fleeing the country, according to a report published on Monday. Women and girls told the International Rescue Committee (IRC) of being attacked in public and in their homes, primarily by armed men. The rapes, sometimes by several men, often occurred in front of family members.

"The stories we've heard, talking to Syrian women, are truly horrific," said Sanj Srikanthan, IRC-UK emergency field director. "Many of these women have experienced rape and torture in Syria, but as refugees [they] can't find



the support they need to heal their physical and emotional scars - let alone provide food and shelter for their families."

During interviews with 240 Syrian women and girls in Lebanon and Jordan, IRC learned of attacks involving kidnap, rape, torture and murder, with Syria's many roadblocks a particular danger.

IRC said it was impossible to give figures, but its report draws attention to the use of rape as a strategy in war. Sexual violence occurs in every humanitarian crisis, notably during the Balkan wars and in conflicts in parts of Africa, and Syria is no exception. In a report in June, Human Rights Watch said Syrian government forces have used sexual violence to torture men, women and boys detained in the conflict.

Last year, British foreign secretary William Hague launched the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative to highlight these issues. The Foreign Office has assembled a team of 70 doctors, lawyers, forensic experts and psychologists who can be deployed to conflict areas.

Hague told parliament last week that the UK is sending specialists to deal with rape and sexual violence in Syria. "We've deployed experts to the region to provide training in how to respond to reports of sexual violence, to improve the prospect of future investigation and prosecutions, and we will intensify this work as a matter of urgency," he said.

Members of the team will train local health professionals to gather medical and forensic evidence and documentation that can be used in prosecutions. Hague has said Britain will use its presidency of the G8 group of industrialised countries this year to push for a new international protocol on the investigation and documentation of sexual violence in conflict. The UN estimates the death toll during nearly two years of civil war in Syria at 60,000. More than 2.5 million people, from a population of 22.5 million, have fled their homes, with 612,000 people registered as refugees in neighbouring countries. UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, said on Friday that harsh winter conditions, including freezing rain, have made life even more difficult for refugees.

The UN World Food Programme has warned that it was unable to deliver food to up to 1 million hungry and desperate Syrians because of spiralling violence across the country and a lack of fuel. The UN has appealed for \$1.5bn (£9.3m) for the first six months of this year, the largest short-term UN appeal, but it remains seriously underfunded.

IRC said aid is drastically insufficient to meet existing needs, let alone the barest requirements to respond to a lengthy humanitarian emergency and post-conflict recovery.

Refugee camps have gained much media attention, yet most Syrian refugees are in towns and cities in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey, IRC added.

In a grim irony, Iraq and Syria have reversed their previous roles as states of refuge. Iraq now hosts 67,000 refugees whereas, five years ago, Iraqis fled to Syria. Lebanon has received more than 200,000 Syrian refugees, Jordan 176,500 and Turkey more than 148,000.

"While some Syrians are housed by host families in cramped quarters, most are renting small, dilapidated unfurnished apartments that they increasingly cannot afford," said IRC. "Others find shelter in sheds, barns, basements and abandoned buildings unfit for habitation. Some are offered shelter by local authorities in unused public spaces."

Urban refugees are straining the education, health and water facilities of host countries. Rents have gone up for both refugees and locals, and tension is on the rise.

The IRC report also described the deliberate targeting of medical and healthcare facilities by the Syrian government. Doctors told the IRC of a systematic campaign to restrict access to healthcare through strategic bombing, forcing the closure of hospitals.

IRC urged donors to significantly increase bilateral aid to host countries to help offset the strain on their infrastructure and ease tension. The US has given \$100m to Jordan, but IRC said donors should give more to Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. IRC said donors must recognise sexual violence as a feature of the Syrian conflict, as well as the threats Syrian

women and girls face as refugees and the shortage of quality services available to them, and develop an appropriate strategy to address the crisis.

For more information and to access the direct Link to Full 28-Page 2013 IRC Report: SYRIA - A REGIONAL CRISIS - REFUGEES <http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/IRCReportMidEast20130114.pdf>

### **Saudi clerics protest against appointing women to advisory body**

Dozens of Saudi clerics staged a rare protest in front of the Royal Court on Tuesday against King Abdullah's decision to appoint women to a body that advises the government on new laws, a sign of growing conservative unease at modest social reforms.

On Friday, King Abdullah appointed 30 women to the Shura Council, giving them a fifth of the seats in the consultative body - a move he promised to make in 2011.

The kingdom's top religious authorities including the Grand Mufti accepted that decision, but the gathering of about 50 clerics outside the Royal Court suggested wider disquiet among conservatives in the world's top oil producer.



A Saudi activist in touch with the clerics confirmed the accuracy of photographs showing them standing in a group as they demanded a meeting with King Abdullah and his top aide Khaled al-Tuwaijri, seeking to offer them "advice".

Tuwaijri, the Royal Court chief of staff, is believed to be King Abdullah's right-hand man and is seen by many Saudis as a driving force behind the country's cautious reforms.

"The clerics were in front of the royal court to address the king and Tuwaijri with regard to women in the Shura Council ... they waited for two hours but were denied access," Waleed Abu al-Khair told Reuters by phone.

Saudi Arabia is a conservative monarchy, backed by religious scholars, that has little tolerance for dissent. It follows an austere Salafi form of Sunni Islam and allows clerics wide powers in society where they dominate the judicial system and run their own police squad to enforce religious morals.

Saudi Arabia is a patriarchal society in which women are not allowed to drive and need permission from their male guardians -father, husband or brother - to go abroad or take certain jobs.

This is the second time in two days that clerics, who have issued a religious edict banning any kind of public protest, have publicly expressed concern at decisions by the king.

"There is a contradiction ... The real Salafis do not do what these (clerics) are doing," said Saudi political analyst Khaled al-Dakheel.

"Maybe we are now faced with a socio-political change in the society where we have the traditional Salafi school of thought that adheres to all its principles and now there is a new generation of Salafis emerging that hopes for different proposals. This requires examination," Dakheel said.

A close ally of the United States, Saudi Arabia escaped the kind of unrest that toppled leaders across the Middle East in the past two years thanks to a massive social spending package and the religious edict from clerics, banning protests. Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Jan-15/202369-saudi-clerics-protest-against-appointing-women-to-advisory-body.ashx#ixzz2ldjvEgpO>

## **Saudi Arabia & Sri Lanka - Rizana Nafeek Imminent Danger of Execution first phase**

According to the news received from Saudi Arabia Rizana Nafeek, who has been the Dawadami Prison since 2005 may be executed at any moment. This was revealed to the BBC Sinhala Service by Dr. Kifaya Iftekhar, who is based in Saudi Arabia and who has been looking after the interests of Rizana for several years now. Dr. Iftekhar also said that the Sri Lankan government has been informed by the Saudi authorities of the possibility of her impending execution.

For several months now the Sri Lankan government has been reporting that moves are underway for Rizana's release and that this may happen at any time. However, it appears that these announcements were made only to appease the strong expressions of concern by the Sri Lankan and international community's who are calling for her release. The government has not been able to conduct diplomatic negotiations with the family on the deceased infant that has the power to grant pardon. Such pardon is usually granted either on the payment of blood money or without such payment by the generosity of the family. Dr. Iftekhar told the BBC Sinhala Service that there is still room for assisting Rizana Nafeek and saving her life.

The Asian Human Rights Commission has campaigned for Rizana's release since 2007 when her case was brought to the notice of the world. A vast movement arose within Sri Lanka to demand her release and there was also massive support for her release from the human rights community and particularly from women's movements. Many signature campaigns were conducted on her behalf and websites opened by various concerned groups to rally support for her.

The Asian Human Rights Commission once again calls upon everyone to intervene and write to the Saudi authorities urging them to grant Rizana pardon.

We once again call upon the president of Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan authorities to take effective action to conduct negotiations and also to renew diplomatic efforts to save her. To know more about this information follow the news

<http://www.srilankaguardian.org/2013/01/the-imminent-danger-of-execution-of.html>

## **...Rizana Nafeek Executed in Saudi Arabia second phase**

Saudi Arabia has executed a Sri Lankan domestic worker for killing a baby in her care in 2005, a foreign ministry official in Colombo, Sri Lanka, has told the BBC.

The maid, Rizana Nafeek, had denied killing the four-month-old boy.

Her supporters say she was only 17 at the time of the killing. They say her execution is a breach of international child rights.

The Sri Lankan parliament held a minute's silence on Wednesday in honour of Ms Nafeek.

An MP who campaigns for Sri Lankan workers abroad, Ranjan Ramanayake, described the Saudi government as "dictators" who would never execute Europeans or Americans, only Asians and Africans.

The parents of Ms Nafeek had repeatedly appealed to King Abdullah to pardon her.

She was convicted in 2007 of murdering a four-month-old baby she was caring for in 2005. Human rights groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have criticised the Saudi authorities for their handling of the case, as have campaigners in Sri

### **Saudi executes convicted Lankan maid Rizana Nafeek**

By Staff & correspondent  
Published Thursday, January 10, 2013



The Government of Sri Lanka expressed shock and grief over the beheading of a maid Rizana Nafeek for killing an infant in Saudi Arabia.

Nafeek had been working in Saudi Arabia for two weeks in 2005 when the Utaibi family's four-month-old baby died in her care.

Lanka, who argue that there were serious translation problems at the time she confessed to the crime.

They also argue that they she did not always have access to a lawyer, and that her reported execution breaches the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which Saudi Arabia has ratified.

There has been no comment so far from Saudi Arabia. More information via this link [http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/01\\_13/01\\_07/010713\\_saudi3.htm](http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/01_13/01_07/010713_saudi3.htm)

### **Increase in women & Girls Trafficking & Poverty in Yemen**

Twenty-one-year-old Aisha clings to her two children as she recounts her tale of horror. Growing up in the Somali capital Mogadishu, she fell in love and bore a child out of wedlock four years ago. When her family threatened her life for destroying her 'honour', Aisha escaped.

She braved the hazardous journey with smugglers across the Indian Ocean to Yemen, and to what she thought was a better life.

Instead, Aisha now squats with four other women in the sprawling, cinderblock slum of Basateen, in the eastern seaport city of Aden. They beg for money in the shabby southern seaport every day, often prostituting themselves for two dollars a trick. They split their meager earnings with their controlling pimp.

"I just want to go to a safer place for my children," Aisha sighs. "In another country."

Human trafficking networks with international reach are expanding in Yemen, and with poverty being a key factor, sexually exploited women are the most vulnerable victims.

Bleak as Aisha's future may look, her fate is better than that of a 17-year-old Ethiopian girl who died alone in a hospital in Haradh, near the Saudi Arabian border.

Bought and sold within the trafficking network operating across Yemen, she was repeatedly raped and beaten until she died. She is now buried far from home and the trafficker who murdered her remains free.

"Between 2011 and 2012 there has been a significant increase in smuggling and trafficking, and of reported cases of violence and abuse perpetrated against new arrivals," says Edward Leposky, an officer with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

In 2011 UNHCR recorded over 103,000 new arrivals in Yemen. This is the largest influx they have seen since they started documenting statistics six years ago, and Leposky suspects an increase for 2012. The real numbers are thought to be much higher.

Female migrants, mostly Ethiopian and Somali, often flee poverty and violence at home. They fork out hundreds of dollars to reach transit points in Djibouti or Puntland, and also for the dangerous, overcrowded boat rides - which can last one to three days - to Yemen. Their goal is to reach Gulf states like Saudi Arabia for work. But along the way migrants are frequently gang raped, suffocated from overcrowding or thrown overboard by smugglers, as well as taken hostage by traffickers once they reach Yemeni soil.

"The most trafficking we see happening here is of those coming from the Horn of Africa to Saudi Arabia," says Eman Mashour, part of the counter-trafficking team with the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) in Yemen.



“There is a network,” she says. “Females can be badly exploited by the traffickers. Women told us they were providing sex to smugglers along the way.”

Confirmation lies in the grim findings of October’s groundbreaking study, ‘Desperate Choices’ - Conditions, Risks & Protection Failures Affecting Ethiopian Migrants in Yemen, conducted by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS).

[http://www.drc.dk/fileadmin/uploads/pdf/IA\\_PDF/Horn\\_of\\_Africa\\_and\\_Yemen/RMMSbooklet.pdf](http://www.drc.dk/fileadmin/uploads/pdf/IA_PDF/Horn_of_Africa_and_Yemen/RMMSbooklet.pdf)

## **GENDER & HUMAN RIGHTS**

### **Syrian Refugee Girls Face Adolescence Amid Uncertainty**

A group of girls sits on cushions on the floor, warming themselves by the diesel stove. It’s cold in this high mountain village near the border with Syria, but they leave their shoes outside the carpeted room, enjoying cups of hot tea and each other’s company.

Aged from 12 to 15 years old, these girls are at our new Women and Girls Community Center that we run in partnership with a leading Lebanese group called ABAAD.

They’ve come here to share their experiences with others who understand what they’ve been through, and to discuss the challenges they face in Lebanon.

As a member of the International Rescue Committee’s Emergency Response Team, I’m here to help set up our programming

for women and girl refugees; this center is a key component of our efforts.

Guided group discussions like this one allow women and girls to access emotional support in a safe, confidential space. Women and girls fleeing Syria bear the scars of conflict; however as in many other of the world’s war zones, their needs are often overlooked.

Yet in these same communities, they are the cornerstone of healing and recovery. For adolescents, fitting in is often hard—and it is certainly no exception here. After the horrors many experienced in Syria, these girls speak of the difficulties they face in their daily lives: how their new community treats them, how it feels to be teased or unable to go to school.

“When we want to go anywhere, we have to go in groups, but even then we get verbally harassed,” says Aisha\*, a young girl living in an abandoned school with 22 other Syrian families. While Aisha and her family may be safer now than in Syria, there are new challenges in Lebanon. All the families living in the school must pay rent, despite poor conditions and overcrowding. The building lacks basic necessities such as clean water, fuel for heating, blankets, and private washing and cooking areas. But with dwindling assets and few alternatives, at least it offers some shelter from the cold. Despite being only two hours’ drive from the Mediterranean, temperatures here drop to below zero in winter, and snow is common. While aid groups are racing to build new shelters and improve those already in use, they are unable to keep up with the pace of new arrivals.. Arsaal, home to roughly 33,000 Lebanese, has seen its population swell by more than 30 percent since fighting broke out in Syria in March of 2011. The town hosts over 12,000 Syrian refugees, with more arriving daily; throughout Lebanon close to 200,000 Syrians are seeking refuge. The majority are women and children, many of them young girls. Lara Nuwayhid, a social worker at the center, provides counselling and support, and organizes group sessions for adolescent girls.

“With all that’s going on, all the problems they have to deal with, the entire trauma





they've been through, people need a safe and comforting environment to express themselves," she explains. "They need to be heard. It's really comforting to talk about what's been going on, to say what they have been through and hear what other people have experienced. It makes them feel like they're not alone." The IRC center is one of two that opened late last year, with two more planned for early 2013. As many as 50 women and girls have come through the doors in a single day. I am constantly struck by the remarkable resilience of the women and girls I've met. They have survived tremendous loss, and find themselves in an uncertain and harsh environment. Yet they possess an extraordinary ability to persevere. Here at the IRC center, they are able to connect with each other, draw on each other's strength, and find services tailored to their needs. Recovery will be a long and difficult process for many. However, at the end of Aisha's session, I notice that she and her peers seem more at ease. "I actually feel comfortable and more relaxed now that I've expressed myself. I feel better after coming here."

\*Names have been changed to ensure privacy. *Alina Potts is the Women's Protection and Empowerment Emergency Coordinator on the IRC's Emergency Response Team. She has been with the IRC for more than four years. Her work to protect and empower women and girls has taken her to the Dadaab Refugee Camps, North Kivu and Darfur. For More information: <http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/blog/1559-syrian-refugee-girls-face-adolescence-amid-uncertainty>*

### **Women Seek a New Liberation - Interview with Hanaa Edwar, General Secretary of Iraqi Al Amal Association and Head of the Iraqi Women Network**

From full literacy declared in the seventies, Iraq is down to 40 percent literacy for women.

From the first woman prime minister and the first woman judge in the Middle East in 1959, Iraq has slipped to a place where an abnormal number of widows struggle, and where child marriages are on the rise. Hanaa Edwar is putting up a fight to win Iraqi women their freedoms again.



**Q: What kind of work does your organisation do to protect women rights?**

A: Through Al Amal we have been administrating the Iraqi Women Network, an office that promotes outreach amongst local women organisations by enhancing relations with many international organisations as well as involving women in different activities and training courses. One of our biggest achievements has been the Parliament quota thanks to which 25 percent of the MPs are female. Now we're working on a new campaign in the frame of the Arab Spring to protect personal freedoms.

**Q: What are the most pressing problems for Iraqi women today?**

A: We represent more than 55 percent of the Iraqi population but we are buried in a society which has been exclusively drawn on male patterns. We cannot see any women leading political blocks or occupying high positions in the government. However, I would say that marginalisation of the local women is due to cultural reasons more than political.

A painful issue is that of the million and a half widows in the country left by the war. Before 2003, Iraq was already full of them but their number increased after the invasion in 2003. They live in very dire conditions and they can hardly make a living with a 100 dollars pension.

**Q: Wasn't Iraq a pioneer country in the region in social development?**

A: In 1959 Iraq had the first woman minister and the first female judge in the whole Middle East. One of our biggest achievements that year was the personal status law, according to

which marriages would be registered in court. Today a big number of marriage contracts are illegal, so women are left in a very fragile situation because it leads to many legal problems which also affect their children.

Speaking about children, girls are often forced to marry at the early age of 10 or 12 and, today, we even have the 'temporary marriage', something which has obviously been imported from Iran. Worrying cases of domestic violence crimes are on the rise amid the government's total indifference. The government is supporting religious orthodoxy which imposes strict dress codes. Women not wearing *hijab* - the Islamic veil - are being discriminated against and, what is worse, girls are being brought out from schools and mothers from their jobs.

**Q: Is the women quota in Parliament working as expected?**

**A:** There is a representative share of 25 percent thanks to which there are 84 women in the Iraqi parliament. However, most of them got their seats due to their personal affinity with the leaders of the political parties, and not because of merit. It's doubtless true that, despite the difficulties, there is still a large number of women able to hold these positions with responsibility, but most are relegated to the background.

**Q: There's also a Ministry for Women in the current Iraqi executive. Isn't it effective either?**

**A:** It's called the 'State Ministry for Women' and there's a draft law to change it to 'State Ministry for Women and Family'. This speaks volumes about the role Iraqi women are supposed to play in our society. Anyhow, we are against any sort of ministry for women because we think that women issues shouldn't be linked with one particular ministry but with society as a whole. Besides, it has very little budget. A Ministry for Women will always be linked to a political party, so what we need is a more independent commission that monitors government policies and empowers programmes to improve women's lives.

**Q: Senior NGOs have recently pointed to a dramatic increase in the number of suicides among Iraqi women. Even cases of female genital mutilation have been reported.**

**A:** The alleged 'suicides' often help to hide murders, and help family members to wash the 'honour' of the family. And they are committed amid the biggest impunity because they are seen as 'domestic issues' by the judicial system. The FGM cases occur in some remote areas of Kirkuk, Suleymania and some parts of Erbil in the Kurdish Autonomous Region. About 70 percent of women have reportedly suffered this aggression in the mentioned areas but hardly any in the rest of the country.

**Q: How is sectarian division affecting Iraqi women and the society as a whole?**

**A:** This is a fabricated sectarian hatred which started in 2006 and which has been imposed and boosted from the highest levels to divide and rule through violence and fear. The lack of dialogue between the leading political parties, and the ever growing role of religion is choking our society. Many families won't let their daughters marry somebody from another sect, and that's something new in our society.

**Q: Next spring will mark the tenth anniversary of the invasion of the country. Can we talk about any social improvement since 2003?**

**A:** It is true that after the invasion we wiped off our isolation in the international arena as well as the taboo over free thinking. Before 2003 you simply could not talk of political pluralism, active civil organisations or any kind of contact with the outside world. But after the invasion and destruction of the country, our borders opened to terrorist groups that added to the local militias, both Shia and Sunni. We are mired in a mess where instability and the lack of security are the only constants. Today we are facing a tremendous political crisis; we have moved from a three-decades long dictatorship to a state which has no effective government. To read more:

[http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/01\\_13/01\\_14/011413\\_iraq.htm](http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/01_13/01_14/011413_iraq.htm)

### Saudi king grants women seats on advisory council

Saudi Arabia's king granted women seats on the country's top advisory council for the first time, giving them a long-awaited toehold in the ultraconservative kingdom's male-dominated political system. King Abdullah's decrees come against the backdrop of heavy restrictions on women, who are not allowed to travel, work, study abroad, marry, get divorced or gain admittance to a public hospital without permission from a male guardian. Recently, airport authorities were instructed to send text messages to the phones of male guardians - husbands, fathers or brothers - with information about the movements of their wives, daughters



or sisters. "The decision is good but women issues are still hanging," said Wajeha al-Hawidar, a prominent Saudi female activist. "For normal women, there are so many laws and measures that must be suspended or amended for women to be dealt with as grown-ups and adults, without a mandate from guardians." But she said that having female members of the council could help to change the image of women in society. "Men can finally respect women when they see them playing a (traditional) male role," she said. The nation's official news agency said the king issued two royal decrees granting women 30 seats on the Shura Council, which has 150 members plus a president. The council reviews laws and questions ministers, but does not have legislative powers. All members are appointed by the king and serve four-year terms. Since 2006, women have been appointed only as advisers to the body. The king has made incremental steps toward reform but appeared to be treading carefully to avoid angering powerful religious clerics, among them the country's grand mufti who most recently spoke out against the mixing of genders last week. In modern Saudi Arabia, which is the birthplace of Islam and the home of its holiest sites, the governing Al Saud family supports the clerics and the clerics support the family's rule. According to the decrees, the female council members must be "committed to Islamic Shariah disciplines without any violations" and be "restrained by the religious veil." The veil in [Saudi Arabia](#) typically refers to a full face covering, also known as a niqab. The decrees also specified the women will be entering the council building from special gates, will sit in reserved seats and pray in segregated areas. Earlier, officials said male and female council members would be separated by a screen and would communicate on an internal network. The Inter-Parliamentary Union, an international organization of parliaments, commended the move as "another step forward" for women's political rights in Saudi Arabia. "Until the announcement last September by King [Abdullah](#) to give women the right to vote, stand for election in municipal elections and be appointed to the Shura Council, the Gulf country remained the only country in the world where women remained excluded from the political process," the IPU said in a statement. Although the council does not have law-making powers, the IPU said the 20 percent quota given to women in the [Shura Council](#) makes Saudi Arabia the fourth highest in the Arab region in terms of women's political participation in parliament. Rights advocates have demanded the kingdom give women more of a voice as many step up challenges to the country's religious establishment, which adheres to Wahhabism, one of the strictest interpretations of Shariah law in Islam. Several women defied a ban in the kingdom on driving last year. Wahhabism, well known for its adherence to strict segregation of the sexes, insists on ideological purity and calls for punishments, such as beheadings and hand amputations, for specific crimes. Under the law, clerics sit as judges in courts and religious police prevent single or unrelated men and women from mixing. In the kingdom, unrelated couples, for example, can be punished for being alone in

the same car or having a cup of coffee in public. Many Saudis observe such segregation even at home, where they have separate living rooms for male and female guests. In 2009, King Abdullah inaugurated the first university where male and female students share classes. He also granted women the right to run for office in the 2015 municipal elections, which is the only open election in the country. Women will not need a male guardian's approval to run or vote. Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Jan-11/201837-saudi-king-abdullah-allocates-20-quota-for-women-in-shura-council.ashx#ixzz2ldkYoK00>

### **...Also, in Saudi Arabia a Committee is Formed to Address Domestic Violence**

A committee has been established to deal with cases of domestic violence. The committee is headed by the director of Makkah Social Affairs Abdullah Al-Tawi and includes representatives from the governorate, police, courts, education directorate and hospitals.



Al-Tawi said the committee also includes highly qualified psychologists and sociologists. The committee reviews domestic violence cases and why the offence was committed in the first place.

If the offender suffers from a mental problem, he will be referred to a mental hospital. If he is a drug addict, he will be referred to Al-Amal hospital. Some cases are resolved amicably, he said, adding educational programs for dealing with violence cases are organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education. The head of the family protection society Sameerah Al-Ghamdi said the society deals with all kinds of family violence cases.

The society also has a program to assist women economically and enable them to effectively deal with their affairs and problems. There are training programs on marital rights. She said violence cases are referred to the Social Affairs directorate, though there are no accurate statistics on the number of such cases.

She said she hoped that lessons on domestic violence are included in the curriculum to increase awareness of the problem. A number of lectures in various provinces on domestic violence had a positive response. One lecture encouraged a school to initiate a "School Without Violence" campaign. A spokesman for the National Society of Human Rights (NSHR) pointed to the establishment of a separate national commission to deal with violence cases. He said domestic violence has reached serious levels and need special deterrent laws to tackle it effectively. Dr. Mishal Al-Ali, member of the Shoura Council, said the Shoura reviewed and voted on a program to tackle domestic violence. He added that Shariah laws protect the rights of women and children. Social networking sites have witnessed intense discussions on violence against women and children. Many have questioned the absence of deterrent laws and said no domestic violence offenders have ever been punished.

Dr. Hassan Basfar, media professor at King Abdulaziz University, called for intensifying educational campaigns on domestic violence all year round. These campaigns should not be linked to certain incidents only, he said. He suggested that a forum should be held that includes highly qualified scholars and specialists to discuss the current social reality as a starting point to deal with the issues of domestic violence. Over the past Hijri year Makkah courts looked into 50 domestic violence cases against women, according to the director of the National Society for Human Rights' Makkah branch.

The majority of domestic violence victims went directly to the branch to complain, Dr. Jawahir Al-Nahari told Al-Yaum, adding some victims preferred to go to the print media to get their stories published. She said the NSHR will take measures to protect women and

children who are likely to become victims of domestic violence. “Many cases of domestic violence slip under the radar because the victims are too frightened to report these cases. “Some women and children are mistreated and punished in the name of discipline.” She said the NSHR is keen to spread a culture of human rights among women and focus on everything that might protect them against inhumane treatment at the hands of their husbands or fathers. Women will only be protected against such injustices when they realize their rights as human beings, she pointed out. To read more [http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/01\\_13/12\\_31/123112\\_saudi.htm](http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/01_13/12_31/123112_saudi.htm)

## RESOURCES & CALLS

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### BOOKS & REPORTS

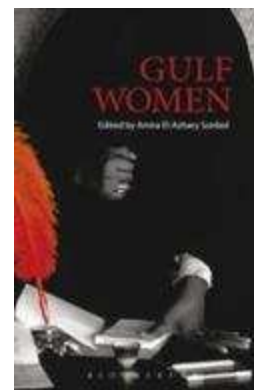
#### Gulf Women - Essays Collection

This ground-breaking collection of fifteen essays provides a greater understanding of the history of the Gulf and the Arab world as well as the history of Muslim women.

The result of a project aimed at finding sources and studying the history of women in the region, the articles are presented thematically and chronologically, starting with ancient history, and moving on to the medieval, early modern and contemporary periods.

They present discourses regarding the life of women in early Islam, considering women's work and the diversity of jobs they performed as part of their economic contribution, the family, the legal system, and laws dealing with women and family from the pre-modern to the modern periods. For More information and to access the table of contents, view

[http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/01\\_13/01\\_14/011413\\_gulf.htm](http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/01_13/01_14/011413_gulf.htm)



#### Social history disguised as memoir... Memoirs of a Shiite Woman

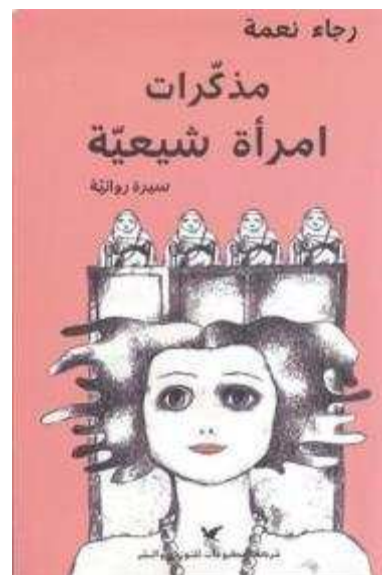
Rajaa Nehme starts her newly released autobiography, “Memoirs of a Shiite Woman,” with Surat al-Fatiha - which begins “Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim” (conventionally translated as “In the name of God, the Generous, the Merciful”).

Using the opening verse of the Quran to commence her memoir suggests the author has been caught in the wave of religiosity ravaging Arab countries.

Yet the opening gesture of the Lebanese novelist and semiotician is as misleading as the title of her sixth book. Everything about Nehme's work catches readers by surprise, subtly yet systematically destroying any preconceived ideas you may have about the author and the plot.

If you are an avid reader of those popular accounts of oppressed and crushed Arab or Oriental women, you will be disappointed by this work, as will those voyeuristic readers on the hunt for the indiscretion and exhibitionism that memoir generally has to offer.

Nehme's 415-page autobiography is not structured around the plot of her own life. Rather it chronicles the rarely tackled political and cultural history of her hometown, the south Lebanese port city of Tyre, from the final years of the Ottoman rule up until the Israeli invasion of 1982.



“On the first day of the [Israeli] invasion of the city,” she writes, “residents were ordered to gather on the shore ... all the men from age 12 to 80 were forced to kneel and crawl on the sand. Israel did not realize that it’s from that same shore, where [its soldiers] forced Lebanese men to kneel, that a ruthless resistance [movement] will be born.”

“Memoirs of a Shiite Woman” is also the story of Wehbe Nehme, the author’s uncle, who immigrated to the United States after a tragic love affair with Bahia, a Christian girl from Tyre, at the turn of the 20th century. In the very rare passages that Rajaa Nehme devotes to her persona, readers learn that she has long been a revolutionary, who lobbied against Israeli occupation of Arab lands, and a leftist humanist, whose favorite childhood pastime was collecting icons of Mary and Jesus. “Despite many obstacles we faced, my generation was really lucky,” she writes. “Watching the world change and actively taking part in making that change happen is immensely gratifying. Backward systems will continue to collapse. Justice will prevail and the mistakes committed by some revolutionary regimes will be fixed. Yes you are a leftist revolutionary. You are the center of the world and [Paris’] May 1968 revolution speaks in your name!” Yet the author is also a critic of blind infatuation with the West. When Nehme touches upon her experience as a doctoral student in France, she criticizes the French education system as “elitist” and unnecessarily strenuous. According to Nehme, she felt compelled to write “Memoirs of a Shiite Woman” due to growing levels of sectarianism in the Arab world, that and a certain degree of accumulated experience and maturity she attained. “The only pre-independence historical period we are taught at schools is when the Christians and the Druze massacred each other in the [Chouf] mountains in the 19th century,” she told The Daily Star in a telephone interview. “This is unfair to all the other communities and areas that make up Lebanon, because in the end we all share the same history and struggles.” The author says “Memoirs of a Shiite Woman” is also meant to cry out against racism and pigeonholing. “I was revolted recently when a childhood friend, who supposedly knows me on the back of her hand, asked when I plan to take the hijab.” The memoir describes how she will always be bothered by the recurring “Are you really Shiite?” interrogation she hears from several friends and acquaintances - as though Shiites all fit into one mold. Yet she says her book is not concerned the Shiite community alone. “I admit that the title of the book is provocative and I meant it to be this way because my goal is to rectify misconceptions and stereotypes,” she explained. “When I talk about women collectively taking off scarves they were forced to wear to cover their hair and honor crimes, I’m examining phenomena that affected the Lebanese across the religious spectrum and not only the Shiites.” Despite the universality of topics she treats, Nehme still manages to offer a novel perspective on the culture of Lebanon’s southern regions. Unlike more intimate accounts of south Lebanon written by other female authors such as Hanane al-Sheikh and Alawiya Sobh - whose style and themes of discussion are as drastically different from each other as they are from her own - Nehme succeeds in detailing the psychology of this region’s residents. “I am against the blurring of the public and the private,” she said. “Even if I’m writing an autobiography it doesn’t mean I have to resort to sensationalism.” Nehme’s depiction of south Lebanon and its residents is subtle and suggests several explanations for their current choices and stances. She writes that southern women’s decision to wear the veil again in the early 1980s - after their mothers shunned it some 20 years earlier - was more of a political statement than a religious one, since at the time effective resistance against Israel was being carried out by Islamic groups. “The older generations thought that [women] taking off the hijab was definitive and that there won’t be any going back,” she writes in one of the footnotes in the book. “Decades later, the scarf will reappear again in parallel with women’s engagement in public life and political struggle. In the 1980s the veil became a political symbol par excellence, namely in south Lebanon.” Nehme’s account on the evolution of Ashura rituals from discrete yearly celebrations, as they were in the past, to extravagant shows nowadays

is also highly revealing. The author maintains in her book that the Israeli occupation made southerners more attached and more celebratory of Ashura, where each year and for 10 consecutive days, they remember the killing of Imam Hussein, the grandson of Prophet Mohammad, in Karbala. In “Memoirs of a Shiite Woman” Nehme recalls a conversation between a Tyre shopkeeper and an Israeli soldier, who was amazed by the intensity of the rituals. The shopkeeper told him that the men and women were “training themselves to [handle] pain because they cannot afford to give in.” “If they are mourning something that took place some 1,500 years ago,” the soldier asked, “... what will they do to avenge something that is being done to them now?” Rajaa Nehme’s “Memoirs of a Shiite Woman,” 2013, is published in Arabic by All Prints, and is available in select bookstores across Lebanon. Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Books/2013/Jan-12/201934-social-history-disguised-as-memoir.ashx#ixzz2ldkTUyvc>

### Human Trafficking - Awareness Day + Trafficking Facts

Although National Human Trafficking Awareness Day is a US-based effort to recognise, and highlight, this issue – as a topic of global concern being highlighted through the United Nations, others around the world continue efforts to increase public awareness and tackle trafficking.

“Criminal networks extend through Ethiopia, Yemen, Djibouti, and Saudi Arabia,” the report says. “It seems highly likely that these gangs would have contacts in other countries.” For more information follow the link to the project

[http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/01\\_13/01\\_07/010713\\_human.htm](http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/01_13/01_07/010713_human.htm)



### Bombardment of Civilians in Sudan - Women & Girls Attacked

Girls carrying water at the Doro refugee camp in Maban, Upper Nile state in South Sudan. Female refugees and humanitarian agencies say that the risk of physical and sexual assault while collecting water or firewood is one of the gravest safety and security concerns faced by female refugees. According to the UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency, girls (under 18) are 32 percent of the entire Blue Nile refugee population registered in the four camps in Upper Nile state, South Sudan.



(Nairobi) - The Sudanese government’s indiscriminate aerial bombardment and shelling in Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan states has killed and injured scores of civilians since the conflict began more than a year ago, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. Government forces have raided villages, burned and looted civilian property, arbitrarily detained people, and assaulted and raped women and girls.

The 39-page report, “Under Siege,” is based on five research missions to the hard-to-access rebel-held areas in the two states and to refugee camps in South Sudan. It documents the government’s indiscriminate bombing and other attacks on civilians since conflict between

the government of Sudan and the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army-North (SPLA-N) broke out in June 2011 in Southern Kordofan following disputed state elections. The report also describes the effect of Sudan's refusal to allow humanitarian assistance into rebel-held areas. Hundreds of thousands of people are displaced inside the two states, surviving on very little, while more than 200,000 have fled to refugee camps in South Sudan and Ethiopia.

"Sudan's indiscriminate bombs are killing and maiming women, men, and children, who are running scared and going hungry," said Daniel Bekele, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "The international community should end its silence and demand an immediate end to these abuses.".....

The United Nations, African Union (AU), League of Arab States, the European Union (EU) and its member states, along with other key countries such as the United States, China, South Africa, and Qatar, should forcefully press Sudan to end the indiscriminate bombing immediately and stop blocking access to aid. They should call on UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to establish a commission of inquiry into violations by both government and rebel forces since the conflict started. Researchers have also received reports of violations by rebel forces, such as indiscriminate shelling of government-held towns, but could not access government-held areas to confirm the reports.

Those responsible for serious crimes should be held to account and subject to targeted sanctions, such as asset freezes and travel bans, Human Rights Watch said. The need for accountability for mass crimes is especially pressing in Sudan, where President Omar al-Bashir; Ahmed Haroun, the Southern Kordofan governor; and Abdulraheem Mohammed Hussein, the current defense minister, are already subject to arrest warrants by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for atrocities committed in Darfur. The ICC prosecutor will brief the UN Security Council on progress on the court's Darfur investigation on December 13.

#### Indiscriminate Bombing and Attacks

On a research mission to Blue Nile in October 2012, Human Rights Watch found evidence of indiscriminate bombing and shelling since the start of the conflict. In one example, the fragments from a bomb dropped in late 2011 hit a 17-year-old girl in the head, killing her instantly in front of her mother, Tahani Nurin.

In a shelling incident near Wadega village, west of Kormuk, a farmer saw a shell hit his neighbor, Ahmed, while farming in August: "When the shell hit, it cut Ahmed's body into pieces. It was difficult to even identify him. We all ran away when the shelling started. And when we came back, we just found pieces of him."

In Southern Kordofan, which Human Rights Watch also visited in late October, researchers also found evidence of indiscriminate bombing. A bombing on the Heiban market on October 2 killed one civilian and injured six others, including Huwaida Hassan, a mother of seven, who was walking to the market. The bomb fragments sliced into her belly. In another example, a bomb dropped in mid-September on a village west of Kadugli hit the farm of Fadila Tia Kofi, an elderly woman in her 70s, and blew off part of her left foot. The attack has left her unable to walk.

"I don't know why the bombs come," she said. "I work. I farm. But now I crawl."

Indiscriminate bombing violates fundamental principles of the laws of war, which require warring parties to distinguish between combatants and civilians at all times, and to target only combatants and military objectives. The bombs used by Sudan are unguided and often dropped from Antonov cargo planes or high-flying jets in a manner that cannot meaningfully distinguish between soldiers and civilians. In Blue Nile in particular, Human Rights Watch found evidence of the use of barrel bombs, which are crude, improvised devices filled with nails and other jagged pieces of metal that become deadly projectiles upon impact.



Government ground forces and militia have also attacked villages without distinguishing civilians from combatants, Human Rights Watch found in both states. A 25-year-old woman and her mother-in-law, former residents of a village around Gebanit in Blue Nile, said that they had witnessed multiple attacks by Popular Defense Forces, a government militia, at various times during the conflict. In June, the militia shot at villagers while they were harvesting and the women saw them kidnap three people, including two women.

Humanitarian law prohibits targeting civilians and civilian property. Both Sudanese and rebel forces have an obligation to take all feasible precautions to protect civilians. They should warn people to leave conflict areas where they may be injured, and their soldiers should not camp or operate in civilian areas.

People with real or perceived links to the SPLM-North risk arrest in government-controlled towns. Dozens of suspected members of the party, which was formally banned in September 2011 when fighting spread to Blue Nile, are in detention in Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile, and elsewhere in Sudan. Sudan should immediately make their names public, Human Rights Watch said. The authorities should free all those not held on lawful grounds and ensure that those who are legally detained are not subject to ill-treatment or torture, and enjoy full due process rights.

#### Deepening Humanitarian Crisis

Inside the rebel-held areas visited by Human Rights Watch in both states, researchers found displaced civilian communities sheltering in the bush, or in the hills near boulders and caves, or in other places they had moved for safety. Everyone the Human Rights Watch researchers encountered was surviving on dwindling food reserves and had little or no access to clean water or basic medicines and healthcare.

Sudan has restricted movement into and out of rebel areas and continually denied access to independent humanitarian aid groups seeking to provide food and services, effectively blockading the rebel-held areas. This policy has prevented civilians from accessing medicine and other supplies and personnel, such as doctors or teachers. The clinics and schools the researchers found, some of them damaged by bombing, had been closed or abandoned. Sudan's bombing and refusal to allow food and aid into the states has pushed more than 200,000 people from these states into refugee camps in South Sudan and Ethiopia. But the camps' close proximity to the border with Sudan, where conflict is ongoing, and the presence of armed soldiers from various armies in and around the camps, continue to pose threats to civilian safety. Refugee women and girls spoke of the continued threat of sexual violence.

In August, after many months of negotiations, Sudan agreed to implement the so-called "Tri-partite Proposal" negotiated by the UN, AU, and League of Arab States. The proposal, which foresees monitors by all three groups, sets out modalities for aid to reach people living in rebel-held areas. However, Sudan did not take the initial steps to carry out an assessment of humanitarian needs within the agreed time frame and now claims the agreement has expired.

"Arbitrarily denying civilians access to food and humanitarian aid during a conflict is a brutal tactic that violates international humanitarian law," Bekele said. "Those who pursue a policy of cutting people off from food, medicine, and other aid should be held responsible, including through internationally imposed targeted sanctions."

The states of Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan lie north of the border with South Sudan and have populations who largely supported the southern Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) during Sudan's long civil war. Conflict between Sudan and the SPLA started in Southern Kordofan in June 2011 and spread to Blue Nile in September 2011.

In both states conflict broke out amid increased tensions between Sudan's ruling National Congress Party and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) over security

arrangements under the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which ended the 22-year civil war.

The northern sector of the SPLM, now known as SPLM-North, contended that the peace agreement gives the parties six months to withdraw after completing popular consultations, which had not yet occurred when violence broke out. The consultations are mandated under the peace agreement so that people in both states can decide on their system of governance while remaining part of Sudan. Direct Link to Full 54-Page Report:

[http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/sudan1212\\_forinsertWebFull\\_0.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/sudan1212_forinsertWebFull_0.pdf)

### **Report about Iraqi Widows**

After decades of conflict, 1 in 10 women in Iraq are widows. Many carry the burden of looking after their families single-handedly. Franco-German TV network ARTE has produced a report on the struggles these women face and the support the ICRC provides.

Noria Khalaf giggled and then, embarrassed, covered her smile with a fold of her black robes. Yes, she said, she would like to marry again. It had been four years since her husband died, and her children needed a father.

Finding a good man in Baghdad these days is a challenge. Not only is nearly every trailer in this dusty government-run camp on the capital's outskirts occupied by war widows like her, with nary a man in sight, but across Iraq women now outnumber men.

Some widows ask their brothers to bring friends by the camp, one of two packed trailer camps for widows in Baghdad. But that is not often successful.

The problem is that widows do not make appealing brides, say the women themselves and nongovernmental organizations that assist them.

"Maybe a young woman with only one or two kids can marry again," Ms. Khalaf said with a sigh; she has six children.

Widows are not a new social problem in Iraq, of course. The war with Iran in the 1980s left tens of thousands of women widowed. Each new calamity that followed created more: the 1991 war with the United States, the failed Shiite uprising that followed, the repressions against Kurds.

And the numbers of widows in Iraq, or as American aid programs prefer to call them, "female heads of households," increased substantially after the invasion in 2003 and in the years of violence that followed.

The Iraqi Ministry of Planning estimates that about 9 percent of the country's women, or about 900,000, are widows. A separate government agency, the Ministry of Women, issued a statement in June putting the figure at one million.

Other groups also have estimated the number of women widowed during the nearly nine-year war, which is drawing to an official close with the last American soldiers scheduled to leave in December.

A United Nations report estimated that at the peak of the sectarian violence in 2006, nearly 100 women were widowed each day. The Ministry of Social Affairs pays widow's benefits to 86,000 women, most of whom, it says, lost their husbands in the latest war.

This figure corresponds with conservative estimates of 103,000 to 113,000 Iraqi deaths in the war, according to a nonprofit group that tallies casualties, [Iraq Body Count](#). The count includes the estimated 10,000 Iraqi soldiers who died in the initial American-led invasion and 10,125 police officers and soldiers who died afterward in fighting with insurgents, along with those killed in sectarian violence.

In possibly one of the last such episodes of the war, last weekend, the Iraqi police said American troops shot and killed two civilians after a roadside bomb exploded near a convoy. The American military denied that soldiers had fired on civilians.

Confronted with so many widows, the Iraqi government is providing only minimal assistance, equivalent to about \$80 a month to those widowed in the recent conflict.

“We expected we would get a lot of help from all sides, the Americans, the Iraqi government,” Ms. Khalaf, who lost her husband in 2007, said in an interview in her trailer. “But the fact is, nobody really cares about us.”

The rusting trailer camp, across from a car lot, represents a social challenge that is not easily remedied – not least because the gender imbalance makes it exceedingly unlikely most widows will remarry.

Some American-financed projects have sought to help widows become self-sufficient economically, with some success, according to program reports. A [United States Agency for International Development](#) program offers small grants to female heads of households, for example. They can use the money to open small businesses like beauty salons or catering services. Program administrators say many recipients not only have improved their lives materially, but have overcome depression.

The program noted ailments among widows, some of whom had witnessed the killings of their husbands, like difficulty concentrating, numbness and heart palpitations. But after the widows started a small business, the program administrators said, they noticed signs of improvement – “more colorful clothing, smiley faces and for some, louder voices as they speak.”

At the trailer camp, American soldiers used to drive by occasionally in their Humvees, to throw candy and soccer balls to the children, a meager help.



At times, war widows became symbols for opponents of the American military presence in Iraq. When an [Iraqi journalist threw his shoes at President George W. Bush](#) in 2008, he shouted that he was doing so on behalf of the war's widows and orphans. Politicians have recruited widows to appear at political rallies. But a half a dozen widows interviewed at the trailer camp said, most of all, they would like to remarry, however unlikely.

In the meantime, Raja Hashim, 32, said she would focus on her children, all sons. "I don't need a man because I have three men already," she said.

<http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/film/2012/12-27-iraq-women-widows.htm>

### **Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media: Indicators to Gauge Gender Sensitivity in Media Operations and Content**

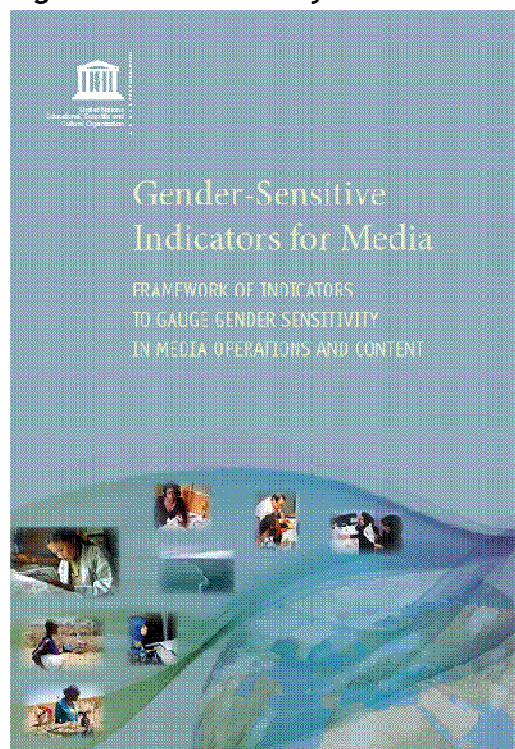
The aim of the Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media (GSIM) is to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment in and through media of all forms, irrespective of the technology used. The main focus of the publication is on the equality and gender dimensions of social diversity in the media.

UNESCO's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment is pursued through gender-specific programming and gender mainstreaming with action in all of its fields of competence. UNESCO's Communication and Information Sector has engaged globally in a wide range of gender-specific initiatives. The two perspectives, equality between women and men working in the media, and equality in news reporting on women and men, are of equal importance and are being stridently pursued.

It is against this backdrop that UNESCO, in cooperation with the International Federation of Journalists and many other partners, has elaborated this global framework of Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media. This is a part of a suite of indicators being developed across all sectors of the organization to enable effective assessment of diagnosis of areas within UNESCO's mandate of media development.

The process that led to the preparation of GSIM extended over a two-year period. It began in early 2010 with a global debate on the UNESCO Women Make the News platform. A first draft of GSIM was then prepared and a year later it was reviewed during an international consultation in Brussels. Thereafter a second draft was prepared. In order to further enrich it a second round of consultation was carried out with UNESCO media partners globally. This essential consultation enabled UNESCO to underline that GSIM is not an attempt to limit freedom of expression and the independence of media, but to voluntarily enrich these cardinal characteristics.

UNESCO is confident that, if fully implemented and properly harnessed, GSIM will have an impact that should be detectable in both qualitative and quantitative terms. To read the full report follow the link <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002178/217831e.pdf>



## **Gender Equality & Empowerment - Agriculture & Rural Development**

Evidence demonstrates that, in economies where gender equality is greater in terms of both opportunities and benefits, there is not only higher economic growth but also a better quality of life. Addressing gender inequalities and empowering women are vital to meeting the challenge of improving food and nutrition security, and enabling poor rural people to overcome poverty. Agricultural growth is enhanced if both women and men are enabled to participate fully as economic actors, if their time - particularly women's time - is released from laborious and repetitive tasks, and if they are motivated by a fair share of the benefits arising from their endeavours.

Development programmes are more relevant and sustainable if both women and men are able to participate in rural institutions and express their own needs and priorities in decision-making forums. Yet, despite increasing evidence that women's improved capabilities and welfare are strongly linked to poverty reduction and improvements in the quality of life - such as lower infant mortality and child malnutrition - gender inequalities continue to be inordinately large in the developing world. The Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment will be central to the attainment of the overarching goal of the IFAD Strategic Framework 2011-2015: enabling poor rural women and men to improve their food security and nutrition, raise their incomes and strengthen their resilience. The policy will reinforce IFAD's position as a leader in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in agricultural and rural development. It builds on IFAD's experience and achievements in field operations and in the broader policy arena in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. The policy will provide IFAD with strategic guidance in systematizing, intensifying and scaling up its efforts to close gender gaps and improve the economic and social status of rural women in rapidly changing rural environments. The preparation of a gender policy was recommended by the 2010 corporate-level evaluation of IFAD's performance with regard to gender equality and women's empowerment. Direct link to full report

[http://www.ifad.org/gender/policy/gender\\_e.pdf](http://www.ifad.org/gender/policy/gender_e.pdf)

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS & CALLS**

### **UN Experts Call for Women's Rights & Non-Retrogression in Tunisia**

Tunisia is at an historic moment of negotiating the new foundations of its nation-state. The United Nations Working Group on discrimination against women in law and in practice is impressed by the broad-based engagement of citizens, men and women, through official mechanisms as well as from the streets, in this process of national debate. It notes, however, that such wide participation in public and political life takes place in a climate of insecurity, given attacks on public speech and expression, including stigmatization of women who speak out. It calls on the State to fulfill its human rights obligations by effectively protecting the individual rights and freedoms, including ensuring that everyone has the space to participate freely and in safety in all aspects of political and public life. It recognizes that while there is consensus on a number of issues, there remain diverging views which, without space for a respectful and democratic debate, may further polarize the society and potentially impede advances in women's human rights.

The UN Working Group on discrimination against women in law and in practice, represented by Kamala Chandrakirana and Eleonora Zielinska, paid attention to women's participation in public and political life, with particular focus on the drafting of the Constitution. During its five-day mission, the delegation held constructive discussions in Tunis and Jendouba with Government officials and local authorities, members of the National Constituent Assembly, the national human rights institution, national and local civil society organizations, religious institutions, constitutional experts, academics and representatives of United Nations agencies.

The Working Group recognized that the new Constitution is seen as a vehicle to rectify past injustices and inequalities, secure existing gains and further advance justice, democracy and human rights, including the rights of women in Tunisia.

While noting that some improvements have been made in the current draft of the Constitution, such as notably the repeal of the women's role as "complementary to the one of the men in the family" and the introduction of an article on elimination of violence against women, the Working Group insists on the need for stronger constitutional provisions on gender equality and non-discrimination which will pave the way for future legislative reforms. It remains concerned at the persistence of loopholes and ambiguities which, if not removed, might undermine the protection of women's rights and the principle of gender equality.

The current draft constitution fails to refer to the international human rights obligations to which Tunisia is bound. It further omits to mention the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights which is crucial to ensure that future legislative reforms do not undermine legislative gains, particularly for women's rights. While equality between men and women is recognized, the prohibition of discrimination, including on the ground of sex, is not articulated in the second draft constitution and there is a lack of provision on the right to remedy. The Working Group is concerned that this draft fails to specify the spheres of life in which the right to equality is guaranteed, i.e., public and private. In relation to women's rights, in particular, it does not specify the different rights, namely civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. Recognizing the efforts to reach parity between men and women during the 2011 elections, the Working Group recommends that the Constitution provides for the use of temporary special measures to accelerate increased participation of women in all spheres of lives. Such inclusion would also have the benefit to clarify the new provision on the equality of opportunities between men and women.

At the level of institutional design, and while noting the establishment of a number of constitutional authorities, the Working Group notes that no mechanism is foreseen to monitor compliance with women's equality and the elimination of discrimination against women in Tunisia. In that regard, it emphasizes the importance of establishing the explicit requirement of gender balance and gender responsiveness in every constitutional authority and suggests the consideration of the establishment of a specialized constitutional authority on gender equality.

While being assured by the government that it is at the final process of withdrawing all reservations to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

including the general declaration, the Working Group has learned that this issue has been brought to the

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

National Constituent Assembly (NCA) for discussion. It calls the NCA to promptly complete the process at the national and international level.

Rural women need to be an integral part of the historic reforms the country is undergoing. On a daily basis rural women go out and work as casual labourers in the agricultural fields or as domestic workers in private homes, accepting abysmal and degrading working conditions, with very low pay or no pay at all. For young people, particularly women, the future remains uncertain as unemployment affects them disproportionately despite having reached a high level of education. Women victims of past human rights violations are beginning to organize among themselves and make their stories heard. Without special measures that would be responsive to the particular marginalization of these women, Tunisia will not fully

achieve its own revolutionary aspirations of dignity, freedom and justice. The Working Group encourages the Government, at central, regional and local level, as well as the civil society organizations to reach out to these women at this critical moment to improve their capacities as equal citizens who are entitled to fully participate in the public and political life of their country.

Finally, the Working Group wishes to thank the Government for its cooperation prior to and during the visit and all the interlocutors for their time and openness in discussing issues related to its mandate.

The Working Group will present its final conclusions and recommendations stemming from its visit in its report to the Human Rights Council in June 2013. To read more:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=12921&LangID=E>

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