



**The Middle East & North Africa
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GENDER ACTIVISM

Lebanon: Workshop on "Masculinity and ending Violence Against Women in the Middle East and Abroad"

WILPF MENA project staff participated in a ground-breaking international workshop on this challenging question in Beirut from 10-11 April 2013, arranged by our national partner ABAAD. Participants came from Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, Nicaragua, Sweden, South Africa and the USA to share global insights on the question.

ANALYSING MASCULINITIES AND GENDER EQUALITY

In a highly patriarchal and militarised region, analysing masculinities and gender equality, and thinking about how to engage men as partners in ending violence against women is extremely perplexing.

As in other parts of the world, rigid gender norms create and uphold a power structure in which men understand what it means to be a man through violence and the suppression of women. Disregard for women is allowed and aggressive means of controlling women is sometimes encouraged. The cycle is entrenched because preventing gender based violence is not prioritised, and both the normative and legal frameworks allow impunity for men who choose to use violence in their interpersonal relationships with women, and with their children.

Much can be done, however. Not only ABAAD's own innovative work on masculinities but the rich experiences presented by experts on the issue - Gary Barker and Oswaldo Montoya of Promundo and MenEngage, and Dean Peacock of Sonke Gender Justice Network - offered exciting experiences from Brazil, South Africa and Nicaragua. All gave practical insights into how gender inequalities are transformed and violence is reduced when men challenge violent concepts of masculinity and become agents of change.

ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS IN GENDER EQUALITY

Given the opportunity to exchange ideas and share our knowledge and skills, participants at the workshop also started to see how our work could engage men and boys in gender equality. For WILPF MENA staff and partners, thinking about how men can contribute to peace and demilitarisation also offered an important lens on our existing MENA work. We were inspired to ask new questions. If men and boys can promote gender equality, if violent masculinity can be turned around, and if clear social, cultural and health data on the benefits of gender equality for men and boys, women and girls can be gathered in other parts of the globe, then why not extend this transformational work beyond Lebanon and into other parts of the MENA too?

Two days of lively discussions allowed us to set an agenda for future work on masculinities with a MENA focus. We all agreed that we want to build strategies to work with men on transforming masculinities, ending violence against women, and contributing to peace.



FUTURE PLANS TO ENGAGE MEN IN THE MENA AGENDA

The workshop concluded with plans for a first platform for the sharing of ideas, a strong commitment to keep discussing masculinities in different contexts, plans to set a 'men, peace and security' agenda, and a shared vision to continue with global networking and deciding future plans for engaging men in the MENA. For more information <http://mena1325.org/from-beirut-abaad-masculinity-workshop/>

Supporting economic growth through a more accessible, inclusive and effective financial system for Egypt

With World Bank support, the single tranche third development policy loan (DPL III) responded effectively to the needs of the Egyptian authorities by providing them timely support based on clearly established prior actions. For instance, as of 2011 financial institutions were processing 2.9 million government payments to individuals and government workers, compared to 0.6 million in 2008.

Prior to the revolution, Egypt's economic growth was on a recovery path, growing at 5.1 percent in fiscal year FY10 and 5.6 percent in the first half of FY11, due in part to a successful financial sector reform agenda supported by the first and second DPLs. In December 2010, the Egyptian economy was still experiencing the effects of the global



financial crisis, but the January 2011 revolution sent the economy into a tailspin from which it has yet to recover fully. Moreover, the revolution led to a complete halt in economic activity and the prolonged political transition, several changes of prime ministers, and Cabinets, as well as the dissolution of the Parliament, contributing to the delay and ambiguity about policies and directions. The Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) had to respond to critical matters, such as capital outflows, depletion of international reserves, pressures on the exchange rate, and rise in the inflation rate, and the overall uncertainty in the macroeconomic policies.

The World Bank support for the DPL III addressed two key strategic objectives of most recent country assistance strategy (CAS), namely to enhance the capacity of the financial system and facilitate private sector development. For the past decade, the Bank has worked closely with the government on financial sector development issues, which has been of great benefit to Egypt to develop the policy, legislative and institutional foundations for a sound and stable financial system. The Bank has been supporting the Government of Egypt in the implementation of the financial sector reform program, through an integral package of analytical work, technical assistance, advisory services, and lending.

One of the key achievements of the reform program was the strengthening of the financial infrastructure, evident in: (i) operational status of real time gross settlements (RTGS) and Automatic Clearing House (ACH) with capacity to encompass low value payments, (ii) the increase of individuals receiving government worker and retiree payments through financial institutions reaching 2.9 million in 2011, compared to 0.6 million in 2008; (iii) the Central Bank of Egypt issued regulations on mobile phone payments and issued licenses to two banks and their mobile phone partners; and (iv) licensed money transfers from customer to customer and from customer to merchant.

Key profitability and efficiency indicators of the state-owned commercial banks continued to improve despite the global crisis and the immediate implications of the January revolution. This reflects the strengthening of the banks as a result of the successful financial and operational restructuring of the commercial state-owned banks since the onset of the financial sector reform program that was continued under DPL III. Some key indicators include:

decline in non-performing loans (NPLs)-to-total loans, from 14.8 percent in 2008 to 10.9 percent in 2011;

increase in provisions-to-NPLs from 92.1 percent in 2008 to 94.6 percent in 2011;

decline in the state-owned enterprises (SOEs) NPLs to reach zero in 2011, as opposed to LE 10 billion in 2008.

This loan made by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) of US\$500 million represents the third tranche contributed by the Bank over the past decade to support Egypt's financial sector reform program. These DPLs have been done in partnership with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), which has contributed to building the capacity of commercial banks, especially in the development of their small- and medium-sized enterprise (SME) and retail operations and in the area of risk management. In addition, the IFC provided advisory services to financial intermediaries—banks, and NGOs-Microfinance Institutions (MFI), as well as micro and small enterprises (MSMEs). The IFC has also supported the drafting of the non-bank financial institutions (NBFI) Law and its Executive Regulations—key triggers in this DPL.

The African Development Bank (AfDB) provided parallel financing to the Financial Sector Reform Program, of an equivalent amount of US\$ 500 million in the first phase of the program.

The Bank, along with other donors and development partners that are actively involved in the financial sector work (U.S. Agency for International Development, the International Monetary Fund, the European Union, and AfDB), continue to work closely with the government on financial sector development issues and monitoring the progress of the government's Financial Sector Reform Program. The Bank continues to serve as chair of the Financial Sector Donors Subgroup, ensuring effective coordination and allowing all donors to leverage resources better for both lending and technical assistance.

Bank lending and analytical support for the government's Financial Sector Reform Program has enhanced the capacity of the CBE, enabling them to develop the policy, legislative and institutional foundations to support a sound and stable financial system which, in turn helps in facilitating private sector development. For more information

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2013/05/10/supporting-economic-growth-through-a-more-accessible-inclusive-and-effective-financial-system-for-egypt>

Saudi Arabia- Launch of first anti-domestic violence campaign

Saudi Arabia has released its first ever anti-domestic abuse advert with a chilling picture of a veiled woman whose eye is clearly bruised and bloodshot.

The campaign, which received the backing of the King Khalid Charitable Foundation, carries the slogan: 'Some things can't be covered - fighting women's abuse together'.

It encourages Saudis to report cases of domestic violence, adding: "The phenomenon of battered women in Saudi Arabia is much greater than apparent."

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IMPROVING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The campaign is another indication of the kingdom's attempts to improve women's rights in the country, which operates under the ultra conservative form of Islam known as Wahhabism.

Women are still banned from driving or travelling freely on their own out of the country without being accompanied by a male relative. But in contrast, King Abdullah swore in 30 women, in February, onto the previously male-only Shura council.

The monarch has also granted women the right to vote and stand in the next municipal elections, scheduled for 2015. It has also been announced that women will be allowed to practice law professionally. For more information:

http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/04_13/04_29/042913_saudi.htm

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Morocco: Women battle against domestic abuse

Countless Moroccan women, continue to face abuse and sexual violence at the hands of their husbands. About 6 million women in Morocco are victims of violence, or around one in three. Morocco's Social Development Minister Bassima Hakkaoui, the only female minister in the country, said last week that she would try to push forward a law protecting women that has been stuck in Parliament for 8 years.



The bruises on her wrists so the signs of struggle. Her still blue tinted eyes show the marks of a fist. For Khadija, and countless other Moroccan women, she continues to

face abuse and sexual violence at the hands of her husband.

"If I don't do what he says or refuse sex, he beats me and attacks me," she told Bikyanews.com at a local women's shelter in Casablanca. "He then will force himself on me, but there is nothing I can do because it is isn't illegal for him to force sex on me."

She is getting treatment for the first time after she ran away from home. At 24-years-old she is thankful that she has no children. And she is determined not to go back.

"I can't go back to my husband. I don't want to be treated like that and thankfully Morocco has these places to be safe," she said.

Her story is one of many in Morocco, and here at this makeshift home run by a Moroccan couple who told Bikyanews.com that "we just wanted to offer a place for women who are beaten to be safe."

The "safe house" is secretive and word-of-mouth has seen it fill up in recent months with women needing shelter.

The husband and wife team that own the flat believe that by giving an outlet to younger women who face domestic violence, they can bring attention to a problem that continues to afflict women in the country.

"It is our goal to be there for people in need," said the husband, Ibrahim, who added that he and his wife had met too many women beaten and abused by their spouses to remain silent.

"It was the right thing to do," he added.

And the government is finally taking notice. Morocco's Social Development Minister Bassima Hakkaoui, the only female minister in the country, said last week that she would try to push forward a law protecting women that has been stuck in Parliament for 8 years.

“Despite all efforts, violence against women is still widespread,” she said at the opening of a regional conference on the subject. “Violence against wives represents 50 percent of all attacks against women.”

According to statistics from her ministry, 6 million women in Morocco are victims of violence, or around one in three.

In March, the suicide of a 16-year-old girl who was forced to marry the man she said had raped her made international headlines and once again put the spotlight on Morocco’s penal system.

Amina al-Filali poisoned herself after several months of what her parents described as an abusive marriage to a man they said had raped her in the woods as she was returning from school.

Hakkaoui, a member of a moderate Islamist party that dominated the country’s election in November, has been criticized for not doing enough to protect women, including changing the law allowing rapists to be exonerated if they marry their victim.

While the official marriage age is 18, judges can approve much younger unions, which are common in rural areas that are poor and deeply traditional.

Morocco updated its family code in 2004 to improve the situation of women, but activists say more still needs to be done.

Women in Morocco are finally taking action and the efforts of places like this safe house, one of many in the city, aims to create a better society and care for women battered by their spouses.

“I thank God that this place exists. I don’t know what would happen if it didn’t. Maybe I would just kill myself to end the misery,” added Khadija as her cuts and bruises were being mended. For more information follow the link <http://www.wluml.org/news/morocco-women-battle-against-domestic-abuse>

Islamists Demand that Bangladesh's Women Stay at Home

Members of Hifazat-e Islam, a radical Islamist party in Bangladesh, attacked female journalists on assignment as the group marched in the country's capital to demand strict Islamic law, including a ban on free mixing of the sexes and punishment of “atheists and blasphemous bloggers”.

Numbers of Hifazat activists chased and physically assaulted Ekushey Television Reporter Nadia Sharmin at Bijoy Nagar on the path of the rally, and interrupted Financial Express Reporter Arafat Ara at Paltan, close to the event venue, when she was going to her office.

For more information, please click:

<http://globalvoicesonline.org/2013/05/04/islamists-demand-that-bangladeshs-women-stay-at-home/>



GENDER & HUMAN RIGHTS

Egypt Risks Drifting Further Away from Human Rights Ideals

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay on Thursday urged the Egyptian Government to take steps to ensure that the current version of a draft law on civil society organizations is laid open to careful examination by Egyptian and international human rights

experts, and, based on their advice, is brought into line with international standards, before it is adopted by the Shura Council.

“If a law is passed that severely constrains the activities of civil society organizations, whose constructive contributions will be crucial to the country’s future direction as an inclusive democracy, it will mark a further blow to the hopes and aspirations that were raised during the 2011 ‘Egyptian Revolution,’” she said. “This is a critical moment, with mounting concerns about a range of issues. These include the new Constitution and the manner in which it was adopted, the apparent efforts to limit the authority of the judiciary, and this current draft law which risks placing civil society under the thumb of security ministries which have a history of abusing human rights and an interest in minimizing scrutiny.”

The High Commissioner noted that the new Constitution risks giving the Executive excessive power over the judiciary by providing for the direct appointment of judges to the Supreme Constitutional Court by the President.

“This concentration of power risks undermining the independence of the judiciary,” she said.

Pillay said her Office has been following recent developments closely, including legal action targeting protesters, journalists and other activists, including the prominent political satirist, Bassem Youssef. “At the same time as these proceedings are underway, people - including members of the security forces - responsible for very serious human rights abuses, such as the killing, torture, rape and other forms of sexual attacks on protesters, and ill-treatment of detainees, have in many cases not been properly investigated by the General Prosecutors, let alone brought to justice,” she said.

She said her Office had submitted detailed comments and proposals regarding the draft law on civil society.

“The proposed law has gone through various drafts. There remains some confusion - and much concern that the latest draft, like previous ones, largely ignores inputs from local and international human rights organizations, and, if adopted, will impose a series of draconian restrictions on civil society organizations, especially those focused on human rights,” Pillay said. “It seems that there is a real risk that the current draft will not only make it difficult for civil society to operate freely and effectively, but may also conflict with Egypt’s obligations under international law to uphold the right to freedom of association.”

“Transparency has also been an issue,” she said. “But to date, all those drafts to which we have had access have fallen far short of Egypt’s human rights obligations, including those contained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Egypt has ratified. I sincerely hope that international standards will be fully reflected in the final version, and - as I have informed the Government on a number of occasions -- my Office stands ready to offer assistance towards this goal.”

“The rights to freedoms of association and assembly are fundamental to the enjoyment of many other civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights - and these are the very rights which Egyptian women and men came together to claim in January 2011,” the High



Commissioner said. "A clear framework is required in order to create an environment that allows civil society to organize and carry out its work for the benefit of the population at large."

"Governments that seek to constrain these types of activities, for example by controlling access to funds, giving sweeping oversight powers to security agencies, and placing undue constraints on international human rights organizations - all elements contained in the various drafts of this law -- risk slipping quickly into authoritarianism, even if that is not their initial intention," the High Commissioner warned.

"Tolerance of criticism, debate, and external monitoring of abuses and failings of the country's laws and institutions are essential to a properly functioning democracy," she said. "Despite the authoritarian nature of the previous Egyptian Government, local civil society organizations were still feisty and effective operators. I am very concerned that the new law, if adopted in its current form, may leave them in a worse situation than they were prior to the fall of the Mubarak Government in 2011. And -- after all the country has been through in the past two years -- that would be a truly tragic development." For more information, please click: <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO1305/S00222/egypt-risks-drifting-further-away-from-human-rights-ideals.htm>

Kuwait: Female Arab scientists urge defence of women's rights

A conference of female Arab scientists has called on policymakers and science organisations to help them network within and between countries and safeguard hard-won women's rights, which they see as under threat in the wake of the Arab Spring.

Attendees of the International Conference on Women in Science and Technology in the Arab Countries, held in Kuwait last week (21-23 April), stressed that it was increasingly important to develop strong ties among women scientists due to the region's political flux and threats to women's empowerment.

"Political instability in some nations [has] raised questions over whether the gains of recent years could be reversed," the conference's closing document said.

Heba Handoussa, managing director of the Egyptian Network for Integrated Development, said that, in the decade leading up to the Arab Spring, civil society in most Arab states advocated women's empowerment and right to work.

"But, although the new constitutions in the Arab Spring countries confirmed gender equality, this aspect has rarely been translated into straightforward laws, policies and practices that are responsive to women's rights," she said.

While the Islamist parties now running many Arab countries say they support women rights, in practice they are reversing many of these rights, Handoussa added.

But women are fighting to keep existing rights and gain even more.

In Yemen, they are trying to do this through discussion with the government rather than protests, said Rokhsana Ismail, a chemistry professor at the country's Aden University.

"The political instability is affecting all developmental plans, not only in the field of science and technology," Ismail tells *SciDev.Net*. "Our battle now is to strengthen the legal and



policy frameworks governing women's workplace rights to promote the participation of women scientists in the workforce."

Accordingly, the conference recommended that national policies should be crafted to support women's progress, for example by funding scientific research by women. Policymakers should continually review these policies to recognise changing conditions and needs, it said.

For more information, please click http://www.scidev.net/en/middle-east-and-north-africa/news/female-arab-scientists-urge-defence-of-women-s-rights.html?utm_source=LIDC+master+contact+list&utm_campaign=9e05cf81df-LIDC_DAILY_MEDIA_BRIEFING_Friday_01_Feb_2013&utm_medium=email

Iraq: Why Women are less free 10 years after the invasion

Baghdad, Iraq -It is 10 years after the invasion of Iraq, and images of Iraqi women from various political parties are filling the streets of Baghdad ahead of April's local elections -- a sign to casual observers that women's equality is on track in this war-ravaged country.

But although the women of Iraq have obtained some benefits on paper, the reality is that they have lost far more than they have gained since the war began in 2003.



On the political front, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has not appointed a single woman to a senior cabinet position, despite the fact women are guaranteed 25% of the seats in parliament by the constitution. The Ministry of Women's Affairs, a poorly-funded and mostly ceremonial department, is the lone ministry headed up by a woman.

Constitutionally, women were able to secure the ability to pass their citizenship on to their children by non-Iraqi husbands, making Iraq one of a handful Arab countries with such a provision for their female citizens.

But on the other hand, women are no longer guaranteed equal treatment under one law in terms of marriage, divorce, inheritance and custody. That law, the Family Statutes Law, has been replaced one giving religious and tribal leaders the power to regulate family affairs in the areas they rule in accordance with their interpretation of religious laws.

This not only is making women more vulnerable, it is giving women from various sects (Sunni or Shia) or religion (Muslim or Christian) different legal treatments on the same issues.

Economically, women have gone from being visibly active in the Iraqi work force in the 1980s -- particularly in the farming, marketing and professional services sectors -- to being nearly non-existent in 2013.

The women who could afford it withdrew from the public space due the violence dominating the streets. 10 years ago Iraq produced much of its own food and had a productive industrial sector -- but now Iraq imports practically all of its food, and farmers and factory workers simply found themselves out of a job as industry ground to a halt. And while both women and men suffered as a result, the impact on women was greater due to their limited mobility in the face of poor security.

Violence against women -- and the lack of legal protection for women -- is also on the rise. Women's rights groups blame the increase in violence on the social and economic pressure

that families face, the lack of public and political will to stop it, and the increase religious conservatism that often justifies the violence.

The saddest part of the story is the lost memory of what Iraqi women once were. I grew up in Baghdad with a working mother who drove herself to the office and always told me that I could anything I wanted with my life. My mother's friends were factory managers, artists, principals and doctors.

It has been just over 20 years since I left Iraq. Today, female college students ask me if it is true that the streets of Baghdad were once full of women driving, that women could walk around in public at all times of the day without worry, that university campuses were once filled with women who did not wearing headscarves.

It would be unfair to blame the regression Iraqi women have faced only on the last 10 years, as the previous decade of economic sanctions that preceded it also took its toll on Iraqi society.

But it is necessary to observe -- especially in light of all the changes that are happening in post-Arab Spring countries -- that female political participation in a country's democratic process cannot be the end of the story. Women's active economic and social engagement is just as crucial to society as it is to their own wellbeing.

America entered Iraq in 2003 with lots of promises, but women's rights were not even on the radar screen. Ten years later, Iraqi women find themselves the subjects of a story that does not have a happy ending.

But despite the challenges that face them, some Iraqi women continue to stand up for women's rights. They deserve everyone's support, for the story of women's rights is the story of Iraq's future.

For more on the article:

http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/04_13/04_29/042913_iraq.htm

Egypt: Discrimination & Marginalization continue for Women in the workplace

Half the Country, But Still Unequal

Many saw hope to advance women's labor rights in post-revolution Egypt; however, rather than moving the agenda forward, the transition period has seen women increasingly pushed out of the labor force.

While the benefits of gender diversity in the workforce are supported by a wealth of research, women in Egypt are being marginalized at all its echelons.

Egypt scores consistently poor on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap

Report, with a 2012 ranking of 126 out of 135 countries. There is a disconnect between women's educational attainment and their participation in the labor force; the female-to-male ratio is basically on par from elementary enrollment through high school, at 0.97 and 0.96 respectively (with a number closer to 1 indicating greater gender parity). The university enrollment ratio only falls slightly to 0.91. However, this number tumbles sharply to 0.30 with labor force participation—compared to a global average of 0.68. While some of this



unequal workforce participation may be attributed to women's personal choices, many of them seeking jobs are denied opportunities. At 23 percent, Egypt's female unemployment rate is almost twice that of the overall level.

Cultural norms are a reason for the underrepresentation of women in the workforce. The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights notes that the perception of women as fragile, weak under stress, untrustworthy, and disloyal adds to the isolation of career women. Fear that they will leave the workforce when starting a family is another factor that drives workplace discrimination. The fact that the social responsibility of raising children is generally not shared between the sexes leads to the exclusion of women from the labor force at an early career stage—giving them little chance to advance their careers. An ineffective and inequitable legislative framework is another reason for women's underrepresentation. While Egyptian law stipulates that women are to receive 90 days of paid maternity leave for their first two children, implementation of this law is sporadic at best. Companies often find ways to avoid promoting women, and some businesses even advance the argument that the uncertainty associated with hiring women dampens investment.

A growing body of research—such as a study conducted by the International Finance Corporation in 2011—shows that gender diversity helps elevate a company's brand value and image, increase the satisfaction of both its clients and staff, and enhance its knowledge base. Some studies have gone beyond the purely economic contributions of gender diversity in the workforce and look at working women's contributions in building better societies. According to a recent Forbes article, women business owners [are more likely to reinvest profits](#) for the social good in areas such as education, their families, and their communities.

Sadly, rather than promoting women's labor rights, Egypt has been heading in the opposite direction for the last two years, and the increasing occurrence of sexual harassment and violence after the revolution contributes to this backtracking. The 2011 International Women's Day march in Tahrir Square was marred by incidents of women being isolated and sexually assaulted. Later, a number of perpetrators admitted to being *paid* to carry out these actions—raising concerns of a dark political play. The United Nations Information Center in Cairo reports that Cairo is the *second worst* in the world in terms of sexual harassment—noting that many cases go unreported. Furthermore, Egypt's new constitution does not have specific mechanisms to protect women. And though the law of the land ensures equality of women in all areas—including economic ones—this is only as long as doing so does not violate Islamic jurisprudence. This caveat could be subject to varying interpretations.

Cairo's United Nations Information Center also notes that harassment is "indiscriminate": it happens to anyone and anywhere, on the streets and in the workplace. In Cairo, 80 percent of women surveyed by the UN reported to have been harassed, some daily. The socioeconomic impact of this cannot be understated; respondents have said they felt humiliated and disgusted, and preferred to stay at home and avoid public places. Many quit their jobs or lost them as a result of taking too many sick days. The Arab region already ranks second-to-last in terms of women's labor force participation; rampant sexual harassment only worsens this standing.

Any real attempt at promoting women should be grounded in legislation. Several countries outside the region have experimented with quotas for women; Norway led the charge in 2003 by imposing quotas for 500 companies to ensure at least 40 percent of the country's

boardroom seats were filled by women. In the decade that followed, Norway has managed to surpass this level with women comprising 45 percent of boardroom positions today, compared to 6 percent in 2001 (around where Egypt is presently). Spain, France, and Italy followed with varying targets and milestones, while several other European countries are also in the midst of passing similar laws. Egypt's quota activists are pushing for more modest levels of 20 percent to start with a phase-in period (as France has done).

Egypt had already experimented with quotas in the political sphere, with 10 percent of parliamentary seats guaranteed for women under the old regime, a portion that was increased to 12.5 percent in the last Mubarak-era election. But in the November 2011 parliamentary elections, the quota system was replaced with the requirement that each political party put at least one woman on their electoral lists. Given that few parties put women at the top of their lists, women had slim chances of gaining representation in the first post-revolution parliament. Compared to the 64 seats for women in the People's Assembly before the fall of Mubarak, only eight women won seats in the 508-member People's Assembly a year ago. The upcoming second attempt at legislative elections shows no sign that the electoral procedures will be any different. In addition to inequality in the legislature, the executive branch is also seeing fewer women; in Prime Minister Hesham Qandil's current cabinet, there is only one woman—Mubarak's had four.

While many support quotas, some women worry that they will face stigma from the perception of being promoted as a result of quotas rather than ability. Nonetheless, starting with this step as a temporary measure will (at the very least) help level the playing field. In fact, [Article 4 of the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#)—which Egypt is a signatory of—supports adopting “temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women.”

Other legislation could seek to enforce anti-discrimination laws. While men and women are equal under the Egyptian constitution, an equal pay act—which would prohibit discrimination at the entry points into the labor market, in job titles, in job ranks, and in pay scales—has yet to be passed. Companies should be obliged to keep better records of the hiring process and be able to demonstrate the *absence* of workplace discrimination.

Furthermore, policies to prevent women from prematurely dropping out of the workforce can include the restructuring of maternity leave. Article 10 of the constitution grants special care and protection for mothers and allows for women to balance family and work. The language of this article should be supplemented by specific legislation in support of working mothers; benefits, such as quality daycare facilities, should be offered—optimally with companies providing in-house services—and the law should clamp down on unfair dismissals because of pregnancy. Additionally, paternity leave should also be introduced as a means to encourage shared responsibility of early parenthood.

Non-legislative solutions should focus on advocacy and awareness— including at the grassroots level. Egypt's state statistics agency found in 2009 that women were largely unaware of their constitutional right to gender equality. Rather than using conventional media, highly popular talk shows could be used as a tool for development by raising these issues. Additionally, a shift in mindset is needed to alter social views towards women in the longer term; such a paradigm shift can only be tackled through a patient, long term campaign to win over all stakeholders—secular as well as religious—and will have to mobilize the efforts of the government, media, private sector, NGOs, and international

organizations. Last year saw 50-plus women's rights marches but backsliding in various aspects of women's rights in Egypt. For more information, please visit: http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/04_13/04_29/042913_egypt.htm

Egypt: Abductions, forced Muslim conversion & marriage of young Christian girls

CAIRO- When a young Christian girl goes missing in the Egyptian port city of Alexandria, her family will call on a certain Muslim sheikh in the nearby town of El-Ameriya.

The local Salafi leader, whose ultra-conservative views condone the marriage of girls as young as nine, has a history of abducting Coptic Christian girls and forcing them to convert to Islam and marry Muslim men, claim rights activists.

And so the sheikh and his associates are the natural starting point for any investigation into missing underage Christian girls. And, according to activists, that is usually where they find them.

"Whenever a young girl disappears in the area the trail leads to this sheikh," says Mamdouh Nakhla, chairman of the Al Kalema Organisation for Human Rights.

In a recent case, a 13-year-old Coptic Christian girl from a village near Alexandria was allegedly kidnapped and held for over a week as her abductors tried to force her to renounce her religion.

According to her testimony, she was drugged unconscious while in a taxi on her way home from school. She woke up in a secluded house with two Salafi sheikhs and an elderly woman. Her abductors forced her to wear niqab, a full veil covering the body and face, and beat her when she refused to convert to Islam.

Girgis claims she was released nine days later when the sheikhs became nervous after her family organised large demonstrations for her return. The Salafis turned her over to police, who feared the girl's testimony would spark sectarian clashes, and so tried to convince her to claim she had wilfully gone to a sheikh seeking to convert to Islam.

"The only thing unusual (about this case) was that the girl was returned," says Nakhla. "In one case I investigated a kidnapped girl was allowed to call her parents, but in all others the girl was never heard from again."

Christian rights watchdogs say abductions and forced conversions of young Egyptian Coptic girls have been going on for decades right under the noses of local authorities. But the frequency of the kidnappings has increased alarmingly since the uprising in 2011 that toppled dictator Hosni Mubarak and brought an Islamist-led government to power.

More than 500 Christian girls have been abducted in the last two years, according to the Association of Victims of Abduction and Forced Disappearance (AVAFD), which documents the disappearances. A growing number of cases involve girls between the ages of 13 and 17. AVAFD head Abram Louis claims the abducted girls are taken to 'safe' houses, where they are manipulated or blackmailed into converting to Islam and forced to marry Muslim men, often to serve as second wives.

"If we inform the police where the kidnapped girl is being kept, they inform the Salafis, who then move her away to another home and then we lose all trace of her," Louis said in a recent interview.



“Egypt has laws in place to protect girls under 18, but Salafis do not accept them,” says Amal Abdel Hadi, head of the New Woman Foundation. “To them, a girl is only a minor until she has her first period.”

However, Salafi leaders have categorically denied any role in abducting Christian girls or forceful proselytising. They claim that so far as they know, the girls converted to Islam of their own free will, in some cases after falling in love with a Muslim man.

Ishaak Ibrahim, a religious rights researcher at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), says inter-faith love affairs and conversions are dangerously provocative issues in Egypt. Rumours of such have led to outbreaks of sectarian violence.

He says many of the alleged abductions involve young Christian girls who appear to have converted to Islam to escape bad relations with their families, or after having engaged in pre-marital relations (taboo in conservative Egyptian culture) with Muslim men.

“The girls appear to have chosen to change their religion,” Ibrahim told IPS. “But because the family is ashamed, and because the police don’t investigate to find their daughter, the family chooses the easiest solution, which is to say the girl was kidnapped by Muslim extremists.”

Such cases only present a problem when the girl is a minor, he says, as Egypt’s Child Law criminalises the marriage of any girl under 18, even if by her own free will.

But Nakhla, who is representing the families of 20 missing Coptic girls, says there are clear signs that young girls have been coerced into converting and marrying.

Referring to one recent case, he asks if it makes sense that a 15-year-old Christian girl would suddenly choose to convert to Islam and serve as a second wife, without any legal rights, to a firebrand Salafi sheikh over 40 years her senior. The girl has never spoken or written to her parents since her disappearance - unusual behaviour in a country where family ties run deep.

“In Egypt it is a crime to marry a minor, and you can’t legally change your religion until you’re 18... yet the government refuses to investigate these cases and arrest those responsible,” complains Nakhla.

While Ibrahim argues that all Egyptians should have the right to change their religion at any time, he says authorities also have a responsibility to ensure that women - particularly minors - are protected from coercion and exploitation.

“The family should be allowed to meet their daughter and get her to explain what she wants in the presence of the public prosecutor,” he says.

Salafi leaders have rejected any state intervention, and have warned against attempts by parents and human rights organisations to return the girls to their families. For more information, click: http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/04_13/04_29/042913_egypt2.htm

Egypt: Birthrate rises as population control policies vanish

CAIRO — More than two years after the Egyptian uprising, the country’s new Islamist government has struggled to confront a drop in tourism and the faltering economy. But the leadership has remained silent about another crucial indicator that has surged to a 20-year high: the country’s birthrate.

In fact, officials have avoided public discussion about population and dropped the awareness campaigns of the past, in an early indication of how the Islamist leadership is approaching social policy in the most populous Arab state.

After two decades of steady declines and modest increases, the birthrate in 2012 reached about 32 for every 1,000 people — surpassing a level last seen in 1991, shortly before the

government of the longtime president, Hosni Mubarak, expanded family planning programs and publicity campaigns to curtail population growth that he blamed for crippling Egypt's development. Last year, there were 2.6 million births, bringing the population to about 84 million, according to preliminary government figures.

The new government of President Mohamed Morsi has continued financing for family planning programs. But health officials have taken a starkly different view of climbing birthrates, presenting the problem as one of economic management – not the size of the population. Population experts are increasingly alarmed by the government's silence and its lack of focus on the issue.



“The birthrate is important. It is not right to ignore the population problem,” said Hassan Zaky, a demographer who teaches at Cairo University and the American University in Cairo. “Before, there was a clear policy. Now, we don’t know where we are going. We don’t know the view of the state.”

Government officials blame Egypt's chaotic transition for the lack of public discourse. But the shift in priorities also reflects a longstanding critique by Islamists of Mr. Mubarak's population policies. For decades, the Muslim Brotherhood and ultraconservatives chafed at Mr. Mubarak's almost single-minded focus on contraception and two-child families as a core component of public policy. Mr. Mubarak used family planning – a foreign imposition – to mask the government's failed strategies, some Islamists said.

“The real problem is with us, as an administration,” said Hamid al-Daly, a representative of the ultraconservative Nour Party and a member of the health committee in Egypt's upper house of Parliament. “The population in China is over a billion, but there is good management and good utilization of resources. The population is a blessing if we use it well, and a curse if we mismanage the crisis.”

Many public health workers agree that Mr. Mubarak's approach, which was backed by international aid donors, was never a solution on its own. But they said the current government's silence on the population threatens only to make the situation worse.

“No one is saying we should concentrate only on family planning, or only on development,” Mr. Zaky said. “We need a mix. We don't want the new regime to focus on one thing.”

Over decades, Egypt's climbing birthrates have helped choke its cities. Fertile land along the Nile disappeared under new buildings, as Egyptians crowded ever more tightly together on the tiny percentage of the country that the government bothered to develop. Egyptians chastised their leaders with taunts that illustrated the crisis: While presidents dressed in the latest fashions, “we live seven to a room,” a chant went.

The state's formal role in family planning began in the 1960s under President Gamal Abdel Nasser. In the late 1970s, the United States Agency for International Development became the main supporter of family planning programs in Egypt, spending about \$1.5 billion on population and other health programs over several decades. Efforts to rein in the birthrate intensified after 1994, when Egypt hosted an international conference on population and development.

Thousands of primary clinics were built around the country, providing family planning and other health services that were credited with decreasing the fertility rate as well as maternal and infant mortality rates. The outreach efforts of that period included advertisements on state television and banners on Cairo streets – with slogans like, “Before you have another baby, secure its needs.”

Dr. Nahla Abdel-Tawab, the Egypt director of the nonprofit Population Council, said of the Mubarak years: “The president himself used to talk about population increases. It was in the newspapers, in the prime minister's speeches.”

Now, population has seemed to vanish from public discussion. Health workers said they were stunned when Dr. Abeer Barakat, an assistant minister for health who is responsible for family planning, made no explicit mention at a United Nations conference in December of population or family planning in describing the Health Ministry's priorities.

In an interview on Thursday, Dr. Barakat said she had simply been trying to inject balance into the debate about population and planning, to reflect the new government's priorities. “What was shocking for them was that I talked about family health, and family planning as part of family health,” she said.

Dr. Barakat, a former official in the Muslim Brotherhood's political wing before joining the Health Ministry, said she was seeking to redress imbalances in the previous government's approach to health care. Mr. Mubarak, she said, “was biased” toward family planning and ignored urgent concerns like cancer and hepatitis C.

And while she said that family planning programs would continue to be a part of health policy, she also said the government should play no role in encouraging families to limit the number of children they have. “Assigning a number is against reproductive freedoms, and against human rights,” she said.

“They are not rabbits, to stop giving birth,” she said. “Manpower is a treasure.”

Among the members of a large family in Greater Cairo, the new government's approach is more popular than Mr. Mubarak's.

Mohamed Rabia Ali, 62, a construction worker who lives with seven members of his family in a cramped apartment, said that Mr. Morsi could establish new communities in the desert to alleviate the housing crisis, and focus on providing more jobs for young people. The government does not need to tell Egyptians how many children to have. “The creator takes care of the created,” he said.

But for the moment, grand development plans that could alleviate overpopulation have taken a back seat as the beleaguered government focuses on keeping the lights on and feeding its citizens. “The primary issues are food and security,” said Dr. Atef El Shitany of the state-run National Population Council. As a result, he said, the political commitment to population issues “is decreasing.”

In the meantime, experts are trying to determine whether the latest birthrate spikes represent a reversal of Egypt's long-term trends, including declining fertility rates. They are working in the dark because the uprising delayed Egypt's most comprehensive demographic

survey. The birthrate had started to creep up during the last five years of Mr. Mubarak's rule, as fertility rates held steady.

The latest population spikes could represent behavioral shifts resulting from the revolution, "because people are under pressure," said Hisham Makhoul, who teaches demography at Cairo University.

"That's one theory," he said. "The other is that it's because no one talks about the population problem like before." For more information:

http://www.wunrn.com/news/2013/04_13/04_29/042913_egypt3.htm

RESOURCES & CALLS

BOOKS & REPORTS

Violations of Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran

This submission, presented to the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights on the occasion of its 50th Session (29 April - 17 May 2013),

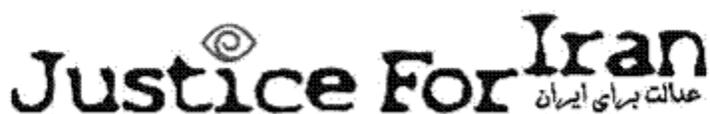
provides a brief summary of the violations of economic, social and cultural rights of women in the Islamic Republic while

focusing primarily on issues in

relation to which the replies of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Committee's List of Issues present incomplete or inaccurate information.

To read the article, please check the following link:

<http://justiceforiran.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/womens-issues.pdf>



The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society

This report examines the social and political views of Muslims around the world. It is based on public opinion surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center between 2008 and 2012 in a total of 39 countries and territories on three continents: Africa, Asia and Europe. Together, the surveys involved more than 38,000 face-to-face interviews in 80-plus languages and dialects, covering every country that has more than 10 million Muslims except for a handful (including China, India, Saudi Arabia and Syria) where political sensitivities or security concerns prevented opinion research among Muslims. To read the full report, visit:

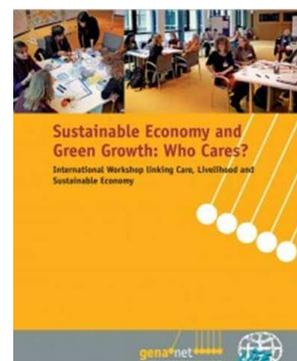
http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Religious_Affiliation/Muslim/worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-full-report.pdf

SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY & GREEN GROWTH - LINKING CARE, WOMEN'S UNPAID WORK, DEVELOPMENT & GENDER JUSTICE

"Sustainable Economy and Green Growth: Who Cares?"- linking care, livelihood and sustainable economy. The publication is a result of February 2013 workshop organized by WEDO partners LIFE and GENANET, together with the German Ministry of Environment, in Berlin. The aim of the workshop was to discuss how women's unpaid work and care economy can be incorporated into sustainable development to achieve gender justice.

To read the full report:

http://genanet.hostingkunde.de/fileadmin/downloads/Green_Economy/workshop_care-eco_web.pdf



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