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Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Justice grants 12 women 'verification' license



The Ministry of Justice has revealed that 12 women have been granted “verification” licenses, which allow them to do some of the services of notaries for the first time in the Ministry’s history.

The Ministry explained that the terms of reference granted to male and female “verifiers” include issuing and revoking mandates, and documenting the contracts of the establishment of companies, and that the verifiers should work morning and evening hours throughout the week according to an integrated electronic process.

The Ministry noted that the total number of verification licensees has reached 1,313 for male and female verifiers and confirmed that it continues to grant licenses while ensuring the quality of services provided to beneficiaries. Verified documents through this service are approved by all government departments.

The Minister of Justice, Dr. Waleed Al-Sama’ani, launched the verification service last year as part of the Ministry’s initiatives in the National Transformation 2020 Program aimed at increasing the efficiency of the verification work for individuals and companies through the involvement of the private sector in a way that expands the privatization of justice services and supports the national economy in line with the objectives of Vision 2030.

Read more:

<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1335971/saudi-arabia>

MENA Q&A EDITOR / ISSUE 100 - AUGUST 2019

Tunisian president proposes inheritance equality for women, with exceptions



Tunisia’s president on Monday proposed giving women equal inheritance rights despite protests from thousands of people objecting to any challenge to Islamic law.

The North African Muslim country, which toppled autocrat Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 2011, grants women more rights than other countries in the region, and since last year has allowed Muslim women to marry non-Muslim men.

But in a show how divided society remains, thousands demonstrated on Saturday in front of parliament against any changes to inheritance rules.

The current system is based on Islamic law which typically allows men to inherit double what a woman would receive.

“I propose equality inheritance to become law,” President Beji Caïd Essebsi said in a speech.

But in the face of the opposition from conservatives, he left the door open for some exceptions, saying families who wished to continue the allocation based on Islamic law would be able to do so.

Parliament now needs to decide on a bill.

Read more:

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-women/tunisian-president-proposes-inheritance-equality-for-women-with-exceptions-idUSKBN1KY1GE?il=0>

Egypt's feminists laud mass appointment of women as top judges



Women's rights activists and jurists hailed a decision by the Supreme Judiciary Council earlier this month to promote 16 female judges, expressing hope that women in top judicial positions will make their mark on the gender-sensitive issues that come before the courts.

"I am very optimistic about the promotion of the 16 female judges as it may bring forth another interpretation of laws, especially those concerning female genital mutilation, rape, safe abortion, inheritance and violence against women and eventually reform the judicial system," Randa Fakhr El-Deen, executive director of Egypt's union of nongovernmental organizations working to protect women and children, told Al-Monitor.

Fakhr El-Deen said that the long overdue move reflects the Egyptian leadership's willingness to move toward recognizing equal rights and ensuring the fair representation of women in Egypt's judiciary.

Hadia Abdel Fattah, a women's rights activist and founder of an anti-harassment initiative, said that feminists face "a male mentality" in judicial and wider government circles. With the increased presence of female judges in the judicial system, changes and reform, particularly regarding women's issues, are possible.

Read more:

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/08/more-female-judges-appointed-in-egypt.html>

Iranian women's movement pushes for more rights, at its own pace



Despite numerous obstacles and challenges, the women's rights movement in Iran continues to move forward. Indeed, while to some the pace of its advances may seem slow, its achievements in the past few years cannot be ignored.

Rights activists have put in a great deal of effort to overcome the traditional, cultural and legal challenges that women confront in Iranian society. In many cases, these efforts have been fruitful and resulted in the removal of certain obstacles.

The ban on entering sports events at stadiums, and especially for soccer games, is one of the strangest restrictions imposed on Iranian women in recent years. While women are allowed in cinemas or concert halls, they have been prevented from entering soccer stadiums. But this restriction was briefly lifted for this year's World Cup. On June 20, Iranian women were permitted to enter Tehran's famous Azadi Stadium along with their male counterparts to watch the match between Iran and Spain being broadcast live on screens at the stadium. While no official statement was made as to who ultimately issued this order, unofficial reports point to a direct order by President Hassan Rouhani to this effect. Now, there are hopes that this will pave the way for subsequent orders that allow women to watch live games at stadiums, too.

Read more:

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/07/iran-womens-rights-movement-soccer-stadiums-entry.html>

For the first time since 1980, Iranian women allowed to watch World Cup in same stadium as men



Female soccer fans in Iran were taken through a roller coaster of emotions on Wednesday — and all before their team stepped onto the field to play Spain.

For 38 years, women have been banned from watching men's sporting events in Iran. But on Tuesday, local news agencies in Iran reported that women would be allowed to watch a live broadcast at Tehran's Azadi Stadium of Iran's World Cup match against Spain, taking place in Russia the next day. Then, just hours before the doors were set to open, authorities canceled the event.

"Tonight's match between Iran and Spain will not be broadcast at Azadi Stadium today due to infrastructure difficulties," Iran's Tasnim news agency wrote less than three hours before kickoff. "Since there will be no public broadcast, it is respectfully asked from our dear nationals to avoid going to Azadi Stadium."

Many fans turned up at the stadium anyway. On Twitter, photos and videos were posted of Iranians sitting, standing and playing vuvuzelas (the plastic horns made famous at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa) in protest. Decked out with Iranian flags, headscarves and other paraphernalia, both female and male soccer fans stared down a row of police blocking the entrance to the stadium.

Read more:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/06/20/for-the-first-time-since-1980-iranian-women-allowed-to-watch-world-cup-in-same-stadium-as-men/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.7a838643f3e8

MENA GAD EBRIEF / Issue 186 - August 2018

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Violence against women at center of debate on landmark bill in Iran



"Ever since we started our term, we have been waiting for this bill," said Iranian parliamentarian Tayyebeh Siavoshi of the Provision of Security for Women Bill, which expands the legal definition of violence against women. "Both we and the Vice Presidency for Women and Family Affairs have repeatedly asked the judiciary to send this bill to the parliament. It has been almost three years and we have yet to receive this bill."

Iranian parliamentarians originally discussed the importance of drafting this bill back in December 2012, during President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's last year in office. After President Hassan Rouhani took office in August 2013, following up on this bill became a priority of the Vice Presidency for Women and Family Affairs.

The Rouhani administration eventually approved the bill in May 2017. Then, due to its judicial nature, the bill was sent to the judiciary for approval. Since then, the bill has been awaiting the signature of judiciary head Sadeq Amoli Larijani.

Now, Siavoshi says the judiciary has omitted 41 of the 92 articles of the bill. According to her, the judiciary finished reviewing the bill four months ago.

Read more:

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/07/iran-domestic-violence-women-bill-rouhani-khamenei-judiciary.html>

Video of unwanted advance divides Egyptians



It might have been another #MeToo moment: An Egyptian woman says a man stalked her at a bus stop, made inappropriate advances, and only backed off when she began filming him with her cellphone.

But when she posted the video on Facebook, it ignited an online debate in which many Egyptians, including women, took the man's side. Some say he was politely flirting and the woman overreacted, while others have speculated about what she was wearing, suggesting she was the one at fault.

Sexual harassment, mostly ranging from catcalls to occasional pinching or grabbing, is rampant in Egypt. Polls have found that a majority of both men and women in the conservative Muslim country believe it is justified if women dress "provocatively" in public.

That may explain the response to the brief video Menna Gubran posted on Aug. 15. In it, a man later identified as Mahmoud Soliman can be seen approaching her on a suburban Cairo street and inviting her to coffee at On the Run, a nearby convenience store. She politely declines, and he apologizes and walks away.

Read more:

<https://apnews.com/c93595d41388443b98a9a57dd8af04c5>

Iranian teenage dancer's arrest sparks backlash as tolerance for radicalism drops



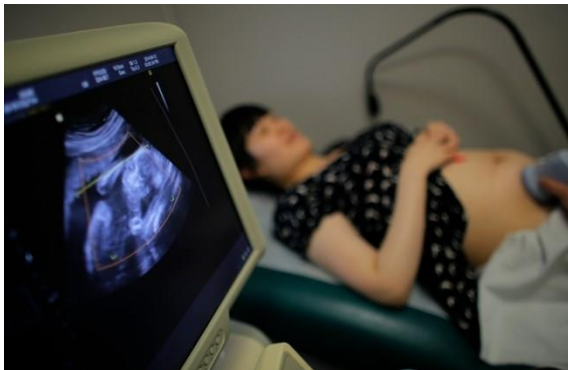
On July 7, the conservative-dominated Iranian state broadcaster aired the "confessions" of social media influencers, including 18-year-old Maedeh Hojabri. Her crime was that she took photos and videos of herself dancing and posted them on Instagram, where she had gained a relatively large following. The confessions were aired as part of a documentary aimed at "raising awareness about confronting social harms and threats," which is nothing new in itself. But what happened next is novel. Indeed, the fierce public outcry demonstrates how Iranians, whether the general public or state officials, have considerably less tolerance for hard-liner excesses than in the past.

Thousands of social media posts heavily criticized Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) for seemingly terrorizing a young girl simply because she was happy. More unexpectedly, a wide range of government officials, conservative figures and even some clerics joined the rapidly growing chorus of angry critics. "What destroys faith and religion and ruins the establishment is not the quivering of a teenage girl's waist, but the slip of the old judge's pen!" wrote Islamic cleric Mohammadreza Zaeri on his Instagram profile.

Read more:

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/07/iran-maedeh-hojabri-backlash-hardliner-excesses-tolerance.html>

Women seek abortions quietly, fear prosecution



Noor was 17 when she became pregnant. After her boyfriend blamed her for the pregnancy, and she felt she couldn't turn to her conservative Maronite family for support, she decided to get an abortion. "When I told my boyfriend [that I was pregnant], he actually just said it was disgusting that I was not in control of my body," Noor told The Daily Star. Her name and the names of some other individuals in this piece have been changed to preserve their anonymity.

Since abortion is illegal in Lebanon, Noor decided to seek help from a doctor in Burj Hammoud whose name had been given to her by a friend.

"It was in his back room and very dirty," Noor said, describing her experience. "The doctor told me to rest for a week, but he didn't give me a sick leave. I was bleeding for a whole week. I felt very weak and collapsed. I was afraid I might die."

Noor paid \$500 for the procedure. Despite her frailty and continued bleeding, she kept going to school and work, afraid someone might realize what she had done.

"I thought it was obvious what was wrong with me and I was so afraid somebody might notice and report me to the police, so I did not dare go to another doctor," she said.

Read more:

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2018/Jun-25/454249-women-seek-abortions-quietly-fearing-prosecution.ashx>

GENDER & HUMAN RIGHTS

Saudi Arabia's ban on women driving officially ends



Saudi women are officially allowed to get behind the wheel, after a decades-old driving ban was lifted.

The change was announced last September and Saudi Arabia issued the first licences to women earlier this month.

It was the only country left in the world where women could not drive and families had to hire private chauffeurs for female relatives.

However, the move comes amid an intensified crackdown on activists who campaigned for the right to drive.

At least eight women's rights activists are being detained and could face trial in a counter-terrorism court and long prison sentences for their activism, human rights group Amnesty says.

They include Loujain al-Hathloul, a well-known figure in the campaign for women's driving rights.

Amnesty has also called for wider reforms in Saudi Arabia, where women remain subject to male guardianship laws.

Human rights groups in the kingdom have campaigned for years to allow women to drive.

Read more:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-44576795>

Hundreds demand women's right to pass on nationality



Protesters took to the streets of Beirut Sunday calling for Lebanese women to be able to pass their nationality onto their children, an issue that recently returned to the fore after the passage of a controversial naturalization decree.

Hundreds of demonstrators for the "My Nationality, My Dignity" campaign gathered at Riad al-Solh Square in Downtown Beirut, advocating for the law that currently prohibits Lebanese women from passing citizenship onto their children and foreign spouses to be overturned.

The protest came after President Michel Aoun signed a controversial naturalization decree to grant Lebanese citizenship to over 400 foreign nationals, to the outrage of those who have supported the cause of the campaign.

"Today we gather from different areas in Lebanon to denounce the naturalization decree and to denounce the marginalization of the children of Lebanese mothers married to foreigners [and the marginalization of] stateless people," campaign coordinator Mustafa Shaar said at the protest, according to a statement released by the campaign.

Read more:

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2018/Jun-25/454250-hundreds-demand-womens-right-to-pass-on-nationality.ashx>

Iran TV film on evils of dancing online sparks controversy



A film on Iranian state television showing social media users being upbraided for allegedly promoting dance online has sparked criticism from reformists in the Islamic republic.

The broadcast, aired Friday on flagship channel Irib 1, featured men and women whose faces were not shown being questioned and made to repent for activities portrayed as contrary to Islamic law and "family values."

Daily newspaper Haft-e Sobh, close to Islamic conservatives in Iran, reported that four of those interviewed were arrested at an unknown date and then released.

Among them was a young woman who became popular for posting Instagram videos of herself dancing without a veil and in T-shirts revealing her tattooed midriff, reformist newspaper Etemad reported.

In the broadcast footage, the woman identified as Maedeh Hojabri breaks down in tears before admitting that "dancing is a crime," the newspaper wrote.

"But I never posted anything bad on Instagram, never," the woman said in the program.

Read more:

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2018/Jul-11/456085-iran-tv-film-on-evils-of-dancing-online-sparks-controversy.ashx>

Protests in Denmark as 'burqa ban' comes into effect



Hundreds of Danes rallied in Copenhagen on Wednesday in protest at a new ban on the wearing of face veils in public, accusing the government of infringing women's right to dress as they choose.

Denmark's parliament enacted the ban in May, joining France and other EU countries in what some politicians say is upholding secular and democratic values.

The protesters, many wearing the niqab veil or the body-length burqa, began a march from the central district of Norrebro to Bellahøj police station on the outskirts of the city.

Demonstrators, often with children in tow, included veiled and non-veiled Muslim women and non-Muslim Danes with their faces covered. No incidents were reported.

"We need to send a signal to the government that we will not bow to discrimination and a law that specifically targets a religious minority," said Sabina, 21, who asked that her full name not be used.

She is one of between 150 and 200 Muslim women - 0.1% of those in the country - who wear either the niqab or the burqa on a daily basis. Muslims account for about 5% of Denmark's population of 5.7 million.

Read more:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/01/danish-burqa-ban-comes-into-effect-amid-protests>

Indian mothers campaign to end breastfeeding stigma



Clutching his elephant toy, Avyaan's conversation is pretty much limited to a happy gurgle, but the nine-month-old might be about to go down in history for helping make breastfeeding in public more socially acceptable in prudish India.

Public breastfeeding carries a social stigma in much of the world — a situation that World Breastfeeding Week until August 7 hopes to change — but in highly conservative India it is particularly taboo.

The country's hundreds of millions of women are expected to dress modestly, and even a glimpse of a breast during feeding is a strict no-no, all too often inviting disgusted demands to desist and even unwanted sexual advances.

So, this is what a petition brought in little Avyaan's name — by his middle-class lawyer parents Neha and Animesh Rastogi — and currently before the Delhi High Court is aimed at chipping away at.

"I was flying to Bangalore and my co-passengers were male. My son was exclusively on breast milk and it was so difficult to feed him there," Neha Rastogi, 30, said at her home in Noida, a satellite city on the outskirts of Delhi.

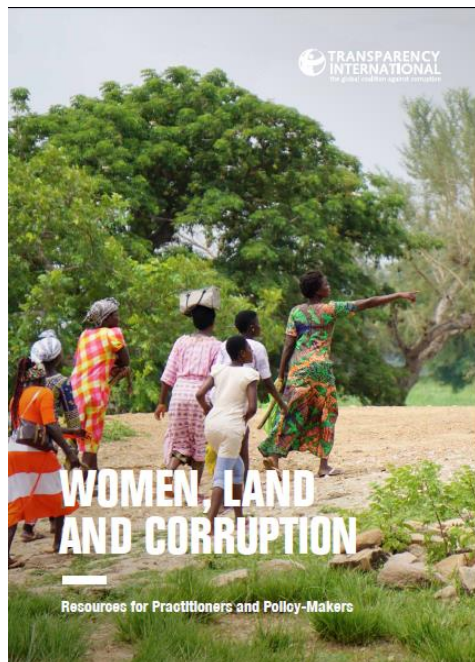
Read more:

<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1350386/offbeat>

RESOURCES & CALLS

BOOKS & REPORTS

Women, Land and Corruption

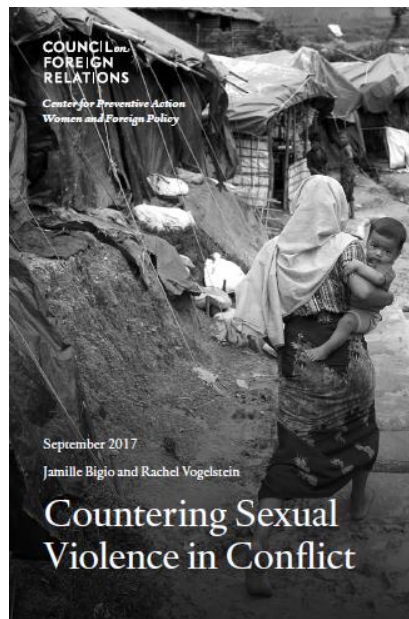


Despite increasing attention in recent years, little evidence has been available on the issue of women, land and corruption in Africa to inform effective policy-making. There has been no compilation of relevant background information, lessons learnt and approaches to tackling land corruption as it affects women. This publication aims to address that gap, providing practitioners and decision-makers with a compendium of research findings, contextual information and practical solutions to help fulfil women's land rights. It presents specifically gendered evidence on how women are affected by land corruption differently from men, followed by responses tailored to women's needs to address gender-based inequalities over land.

Read more:

<https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/women-land-and-corruption-resources-for-practitioners-and-policy-makers>

Countering Sexual Violence in Conflict



The victims of today's armed conflicts are more likely to be civilians than soldiers. Armies and armed groups often subject noncombatants—particularly women and children—to conflict-related sexual violence, such as rape, sexual slavery, and forced marriage. Despite international recognition of this devastating abuse as a crime against humanity, sexual violence continues to plague conflicts from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to Syria. This practice has also proliferated among extremist groups, including Boko Haram in Nigeria and the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Additionally, sexual violence has tarnished the operations of peacekeepers charged with protecting civilians, thereby undermining the integrity and effectiveness of international peacekeeping institutions across the globe.

Sexual violence in conflict is not simply a gross violation of human rights—it is also a security challenge. Such violence has consequences that increase the costs of armed conflict, rendering its management more difficult.

For a direct link to publication:

https://cfrd8-files.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/Discussion_Paper_Bigio_Vogelstein_Sexual_Violence_Conflict_OR_1.pdf

Access for All Series: Policies for Inclusive TOD



In many cities and regions around the world, the automobile and its related infrastructure have deepened social divisions between the haves, those who have access to the services and opportunities that cities bring, and the havenots, those who are excluded from these. Low-income communities tend to live either farther from their jobs and central business districts or in areas that are poorly served by public transportation.

While there is a trend to design urban centers as areas where people live and work, there is a greater need to build more accessible neighborhoods around transit hubs. Transit-oriented development (TOD) provides integrated urban places that bring together people, activities, services, buildings, and public space, but it does not inherently lead to social inclusion and equality and can result in displacement.

For a direct link to publication:

https://3gozaa3xxbpb499ejp30lxc8-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/access_for_all_series_1_baja.pdf

UN High Level Forum on Sustainable Development – Secretary-General’s Report – Goal 5: Gender Equality & Empowerment

In accordance with General Assembly decision 70/1, the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the United Nations system, has the honour to transmit the 2018 report on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. This report provides a global overview of the current situation of the Sustainable Development Goals, based on the latest available data for indicators in the global indicator framework.

1. This report by the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the United Nations system, present an overview of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to inform the highlevel political forum, as mandated by General Assembly resolution 70/1 (para. 83). It is based on a selection of indicators for which data are available, from the global indicator framework developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators and adopted by the General Assembly at its seventy-first session in July 2017 (resolution 71/313). Some targets are not reflected at this stage, owing to a lack of data, or because they are measured by indicators that are still undergoing methodological development.

2. For most indicators presented, values represent global, regional and subregional aggregates. They are calculated from data from national statistical systems, compiled by international agencies, based on their respective mandates and specialized expertise often with adjustments to allow for international comparability or supplemented by estimates when data are lacking.

Read more:

<https://wunrn.com/2018/08/un-high-level-forum-on-sustainable-development-secretary-generals-report-goal-5-gender-equality-empowerment/>

For a direct link to publication:

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/18541SG_SDG_Progress_Report_2018_ECOSOC.pdf

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