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NEWS & ARTICLES

GENDER ACTIVISM

In Lebanon

Women's rights activists set to wage new campaign

Sit-ins, lobbying the government and further public awareness will be part of a new drive to eliminate gender-based discrimination, activists said in Lebanon.

A sit-in in front of Parliament will take place on Nov. 13, and another one is tentatively scheduled for Dec. 10, which marks U.N. Human Rights Day.

Campaigners from the group N-Cedaw, or the national committee to promote an end to discrimination against women, acknowledged that public enthusiasm for the campaign has dipped recently, prompting a decision to step up their efforts.

After a meeting at UNESCO Palace, N-Cedaw activists announced they would organize conferences around the country and distribute leaflets reading "Because they are my children, they deserve to get my nationality."

The group has petitioned Prime Minister Najib Mikati to demand that men and women enjoy equal opportunity to gain public sector employment.

The activists praised Labor Minister Charbel Nahhas for easing restrictions on granting work permits to non-Lebanese husbands and children of Lebanese women, but said more needed to be done.

The group wants to see the foreign husband of a Lebanese woman enjoy the same labor rights as locals, instead of the current requirement of a work permit, renewable every three years.

N-Cedaw's core demand involves the right of a Lebanese mother to pass on her nationality to her children. The group has lobbied the government on this but no action has been forthcoming. "The major reason for this silence is related to the issue of Palestinian men," said activist Sana Solh. To read the entire article please check : <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2011/Oct-21/151832-womens-rights-activists-set-to-wage-new-campaign.ashx#ixzz1bPCU1e7v>

Engaging Men In Ending Violence Against Women

"Be a Man. Real Men Take a Stand Against Violence" ; The message of Engaging Men in ending



Violence Against Women (VAW) has to be a positive one. Until now in initiatives for women's human rights in the Middle East, men are only depicted as the perpetrators of Domestic Violence (DV). Although this may be the closest picture to the reality of DV in the Middle East, relaying this message has not only become a cliché, but can actually increase male resistance and defensiveness to the issue. Furthermore, messages where men are only perpetrators of DV run the very dangerous risk of creating such a close association between men and DV, that the terms become synonymous with one another. The result, sadly, is that in our attempt to raise awareness on a pivotal human rights issue in our region, we have actually allowed the core message to become lost. We, as women's human rights activists, are against the violence and abuse that create and maintain gender inequalities in our region. We are against a system that socializes boys and girls to become adults that do not question or combat these injustices. We are against the unfair power relations between the genders in our patriarchal societies. We are NOT against men. Our ideal goal, in fact, is a society where men and women live proudly with one another. A society where all citizens have equal rights, opportunities, and challenges that are not discriminate based on gender. For more information please click on the link:

http://www.wunrn.com/news/2011/10_11/10_10/101011_lebanon.htm

In Tunisia

Tunisia Campaign for Women to Vote

In a bid to encourage more women to vote in the fourthcoming Constituent Assembly elections, Tunisia has launched a nationwide campaign. The media campaign to run from Oct. 1 to 20 is an initiative of the ministry of women's affairs and is airing on radio and television spots, plus on posters.

The campaign was officially launched by the minister of women's affairs, Lilia Laabidi, who encouraged women to take part in political life and assert their presence in the Constituent Assembly to be held October 23. Groups of young people will also help raise awareness among women on the election, the government press agency TAP said. In spite of the decision to impose gender parity within the Constituent Assembly, the rate of women who registered for voting has not exceeded 20 per cent. Recently, women organisations and NGOs have also launched an appeal to Tunisian women to be more assertive in political life in the North African country, which boasts one of the best records of women empowerment in the Arab world. For more information please follow the link http://www.wunrn.com/news/2011/10_11/10_03/100311_tunisia.htm



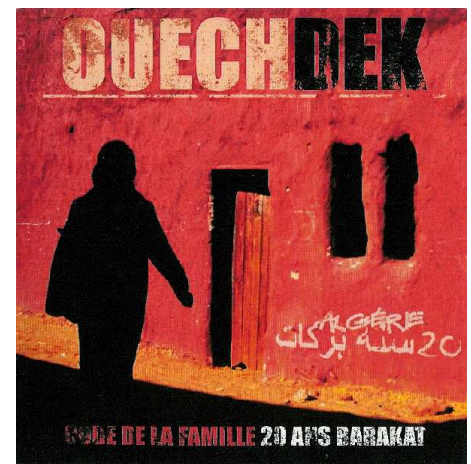
In Algeria

Women's Song & Video as Advocacy for Rights in Algeria

In the summer of 2003, twenty female musicians from Algeria, France and Argentina gathered in a recording studio in Paris, France. Their mission: to overturn Algeria's Family Code -- a set of laws that, for over 20 years, has relegated women to second-class citizenship. Their instrument: a song.

Twenty Years Earlier: Algeria's Family Code

On June 9, 1984, after two decades of debates and vehement opposition, members of the Algerian Parliament succeeded in passing the Family Code. The Code put legal provisions into place to regulate marriage and family relations in accordance with conservative interpretations of Islam. Under the Family Code, women cannot freely choose a husband without the consent of their guardians, usually their fathers. In marriage, women must obey their husbands. Women are less free to divorce. They receive smaller shares of inheritance, and they have no legal guardianship of their children.



Supporters have lauded the Code for upholding Islamic laws and ethics. Critics, including feminists and secularists, have argued that the law has institutionalized a second-class citizenship of women. Women Declare "Twenty Years is Enough!"

2004 marked the twenty-year anniversary of the Family Code in Algeria. Determined to put an end to the systemic oppression of women brought on by these laws, a group of Algerian women formed the collective 20 ans, Barakat! (20 years is enough!) and produced a music video denouncing the code.

Twenty women from diverse backgrounds sang and recorded the song "Ouek dek yal qadi" (What came over you, judge?) proclaiming: "This law must be undone and never done again!" Distributed via radio, French television and the internet, the resulting music video, featured here, exemplifies women working creatively and collaboratively to rally the public to change Algerian politics. For more info please follow the link

http://www.wunrn.com/news/2011/10_11/10_03/100311_algeria.htm

In Saudi Arabia

VNC Statement on Full Rights for Saudi Arabia Women



SAUDI ARABIA: WE SAY "YES" TO WOMEN'S FULL ENJOYMENT OF THEIR RIGHTS

The Violence is Not our Culture (VNC) Campaign welcomes long awaited and recent reforms announced by King Abdullah Bin-Abd-al-Aziz Al Saud, that promise to give Saudi Arabian women the right to vote and run for office in municipal council elections, and to become full voting members of the next Shura council. The promise to increase women's participation in civic life is a tribute to women's efforts on the ground who have been campaigning inside the country, despite strict and rigid opposition.

However the measure remains, in King Abdullah's own words, a "cautious reform". Women's right to vote will not take effect until the next elections in 2015, and women will become full voting members in the Shura council as members only from the next term. Furthermore, women's rights to autonomy and broader public participation remain precariously restricted in Saudi Arabia.

Just one day following King Abdullah's announcement, a Saudi woman named Shaima Jarman was sentenced by religious court to 10 lashes for defying the country's ban on female drivers. Shaima was found guilty of 'driving without permission' in Jeddah last July.

There are no written laws that restrict women from driving alone in Saudi Arabia. Rather, the ban is rooted in conservative religious and cultural interpretations that promote a system of male guardianship and control over women. These systems deny women the full enjoyment of their basic human rights, especially the rights to freedom of movement, speech and association.

The driving ban, for example, is claimed to be a form of 'women's protection'. Though framed as a religious obligation, many groups – from women's rights defenders to religious clerics – say the religious 'justification' is irrelevant, citing the Prophet Muhammad's wives who rode camels and horses alone, the only transportation in their day. Saudi Arabia is the only country – Muslim or otherwise – that bans women from driving. The ban on Saudi women's right to drive is part of a larger problem faced by Saudi women in their daily lives. Conservative guardianship actively criminalizes women's autonomy, and cruel and degrading forms of punishment such as stoning and flogging continue to pose threats to women for alleged 'crimes', especially those that relate to their 'moral conduct' and sexuality.

1 The Shura Council is an appointed consultative body which can review and oversee legislation in the country, but has no binding authority to pass or veto laws. For more information, see: http://www.wunrn.com/news/2011/10_11/10_03/100311_algeria.htm

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the statement, please follow the link <http://www.wluml.org/action/saudi-arabia-wluml/vnc-statement-we-say-yes-womens-full-enjoyment-their-rights>

GENDER & HUMAN RIGHTS

MPs drafting domestic violence law in Lebanon

Metn MP Ghassan Moukheiber said that religious figures who earlier opposed legislation that criminalizes domestic violence are beginning to change their stance.

During a meeting with members of the Youth Shadow Government, Moukheiber said MPs were fine-tuning draft legislation that would outlaw domestic violence against women, "and have reached an agreement with religious figures who had initially opposed the draft law."

In June, Dar al-Fatwa rejected a draft law to protect women from domestic violence, calling it a Western norm that contradicted Islamic values.

Moukheiber said MPs had agreed to establish a separate department and a hotline with the Internal Security Forces to reach out to women who report domestic violence.

Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2011/Oct-20/151759-mps-drafting-domestic-violence-law-moukheiber.ashx#ixzz1bPJbb1Fh>

Woman arrested for allegedly assaulting lawyer

A woman was arrested in Beirut for allegedly assaulting a lawyer during a court session at the Justice Palace, the National News Agency reported.

According to the NNA, Jdeideh police arrested Joumana Jabbara at the request of the Prosecution General in Mount Lebanon for striking lawyer Camille Harb at court.

Jabbara allegedly insulted Harb and disrupted the session at the Justice Palace, as well as fought with the security guards who arrived to restrain her, violently resisting them and escaping. Later, Jabbara allegedly fabricated claims in order to mislead the public and gain the support of civil society by describing the incident as a case of violence against women. Read more:

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2011/Oct-20/151765-woman-arrested-for-allegedly-assaulting-lawyer.ashx#ixzz1bPlx9Wki>

Egyptian film needs more stories about women

Egyptian cinema is the most widely viewed in the Arab world, and Egypt is one of a few countries in the region that has maintained this industry since the 1930s, despite war and instability. Accordingly, Egyptian movies, which have long inspired people across the Arab world, have significant potential to positively affect women's roles in the region and address social issues that might otherwise be taboo for mainstream media. These include such a vital topic as divorce - which affects

Egyptian women of all socio-economic levels. As Farida Mar'y, a movie critic, has pointed out: "Currently divorce rates in Egypt are very high, yet we don't see [portrayals of] the financial and psychological challenges divorced women face on the big screen. On the contrary, they are portrayed as opportunists whose only aim is to catch a husband. This is extremely unfair." While women in the Arab world face many challenges, divorced women, especially in Egypt, face some significant hurdles. Most divorcees were previously housewives who, when they found themselves on their own, needed to work to earn income. For that, they often had to go back to school or attend training sessions, since they might have been out of the workforce for years, or never worked at all. According to Egyptian law, fathers are required to support their children financially. However, women are expected to support themselves while simultaneously taking care of the children in their custody. Divorced women also deal with society's negative attitudes and stigmas. Consequently, a divorced woman is not likely to marry again, while a divorced man often does. The entertainment industry cannot be depended upon to help change attitudes toward divorced women in society. However, there are specialized film projects and initiatives that are representing their interests. Radio Divorcee, for example, is an independent online radio station created and managed by Mahasen Saber, a divorcee who felt that other women in a similar situation were not well-represented in mainstream media. She decided to raise awareness about the challenges that she and other divorced women experienced in their daily lives, while at the same time highlighting their achievements and success stories.

Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Opinion/Commentary/2011/Oct-20/151718-egyptian-film-needs-more-stories-about-women.ashx#ixzz1bPKes4c0>



Nobel laureate implores U.N. to not offer immunity to Saleh

Yemeni Nobel peace laureate Tawakul Karman made an impassioned plea to the United Nations Tuesday to repudiate a Gulf Arab plan that would grant immunity to her country's "war criminal" president.

Karman, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize jointly with two Liberian women this month, arrived in New York as the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council circulated a draft resolution to the full 15-nation body. That proposal urges the swift "signature and implementation" of the Gulf Arab plan, under which Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh would be immune from prosecution.

“The youth’s peaceful revolution is against the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) initiative, especially because it gives immunity to Saleh and his family,” Karman told reporters at a demonstration near the United Nations, where she was greeted by a cheering crowd of around 150 Yemeni supporters.

“We don’t think that the Security Council will be trapped in a resolution that will give immunity to the regime,” said Karman, who dedicated her Nobel prize to the Arab uprisings and to those killed in the upheavals.

While it urges implementation of the GCC deal, the draft resolution, obtained by Reuters, would have the council say it “stresses that all those responsible for violence, human rights violations and abuses should be held accountable.” It did not give any details on how accountability would be achieved.

The human rights groups Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch criticized the immunity deal that is central to the GCC plan as well.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s spokesman Martin Nesirky also rejected the idea of an amnesty for Yemen, saying: “It’s vital that there should be no impunity.” A spokesman for the U.N. human rights office in Geneva said international law prohibits amnesties for gross violations of human rights. To read more please follow the link: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2011/Oct-20/151727-nobel-laureate-implores-un-to-not-offer-immunity-to-saleh.ashx#ixzz1bPTYEHDU>

Nawal El Saadawi: 'I am going to carry on this fight for ever

At the age of six, in the summer of 1937, Nawal El Saadawi was pinned down by four women in her home in Egypt. A midwife, holding a sharpened razor blade, pulled out her clitoris and cut it off. “Since I was a child that deep wound left in my body has never healed,” she wrote in her first autobiography, *A Daughter of Isis*.



“I lay in a pool of blood. After a few days, the bleeding stopped, and the daya [midwife] peered between my thighs and said, ‘All is well. The wound has healed, thanks be to God.’ But the pain was there, like an abscess in my flesh.”

The 80-year-old feminist activist has been shortlisted for the Women of the Year awards after spending the past 60 years campaigning for an end to the barbaric practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), which has been suffered by 140 million women worldwide. An estimated two million girls are at risk each year. She was able to protect her own daughter from the practice, and her fight to “create awareness and unveil the mind” has saved many others.

“I have been fighting against this since medical college, but the political system, especially under [Anwar] Sadat and [Hosni] Mubarak, encouraged religious fundamentalists,” she says. “When you have increasing power of religious groups, oppression of women increases. Women are oppressed in all religions.” For more information please follow the link <http://www.wluml.org/news/egypt-nawal-el-saadawi-i-am-going-carry-fight-ever>

A Conversation With Saudi Women’s Rights Campaigner Wajeha al-Huwaider



Wajeha al-Huwaider is perhaps the best-known Saudi campaigner for women’s rights, human rights and democracy. She has protested energetically against the kingdom’s lack of formal laws (the Koran is it) and basic freedoms and in particular against the guardianship system, under which every female, from birth to death, needs the permission of a male relative to make decisions in all important areas of life—education, travel, marriage, employment, finances, even surgery. In 2008 a video of her driving a car, which is forbidden for women in Saudi Arabia, created a sensation when it was posted on

YouTube. Al-Huwaider is a strong supporter of the June 17 Movement, which calls on Saudi women to start driving on that date, and made the celebrated YouTube video of its co-founder, Manal al-Sherif, jailed for nine days in May for driving. While this interview was in preparation, she was briefly detained by the police when she tried to visit Nathalie Morin, a French-Canadian woman held captive with her children by her Saudi husband. For more information please follow the link <http://www.wluml.org/news/saudi-arabia-conversation-saudi-womens-rights-campaigner-wajeha-al-huwaider>

Harsh Challenges for Females Heading Families & IDP's in Iraq

Women in Iraq who must shoulder the burden of caring for their families alone because their husbands have been killed, arrested or disabled by war injuries, or have gone missing, are among those worst affected by the consequences of years of armed conflict. While recognizing the efforts that have already been undertaken to improve their situation, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) calls for further action to be taken on the part of all concerned.

"Women heading households and their dependents have to struggle with extremely harsh living conditions," said Magne Barth, the head of the ICRC delegation in Baghdad, at a press conference today in the Iraqi capital.

He presented the results of a survey carried out by the ICRC to acquire a better understanding of the state of Iraqi women supporting their families alone. The survey involved interviews with 119 women and depicted the hard choices they have to make in order to feed their families in the absence of a husband, father or brother. The ICRC also released a film today that highlights the difficulties the women have to face.

"Around 70 per cent of them spend more than they earn. They have to borrow money, sell what little they own and avoid expenses by going without health care or by taking their children out of school," said Mr Barth. "Moreover, 40 per cent of the families we surveyed have to send children, usually sons as young as 12 or 13 years old, out to work." For more information please follow the link http://www.wunrn.com/news/2011/10_11/10_03/100311_iraq2.htm



Stakeholder Report to the UN Universal Periodic Review Process by Karama



Iraq has demonstrated certain efforts to improve the human rights of women in these past four years. The quota in effect for elections of 2005 and 2009 increased women's representation in national and provincial legislative bodies to 25%, one of the highest levels in the region. Also, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq amended its Personal Status Law in 2008 to place restrictions on polygamy, created emergency shelters to provide a measure of protection to women from violence, established a Cabinet-level Committee on Violence against Women, and set up a Directorate to Follow up Violence against Women in each KRG governorate.

However, among the areas of human rights concerns in Iraq, the environment for women's safety from violence and the threats to women's security are worse in many ways than they were four years ago. To read the entire report please follow the link <http://www.el-karama.org/sites/default/files/Karama%20UPRstakeholder%20Iraq.pdf>

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

In Saudi-Arabia

Saudi woman to be lashed for defying driving ban

A Saudi woman has been sentenced to be lashed 10 times with a whip for defying the kingdom's prohibition on female drivers. It is the first time a legal punishment has been handed down for a violation of the longtime ban in the ultraconservative Muslim nation. Police usually stop female drivers, question them and let them go after they sign a pledge not to drive again. But dozens of women have continued to take to the roads since June in a campaign to break the taboo. Although there has been no official confirmation of the ruling, Princess Amira al-Taweel, wife of the Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, tweeted: "Thank God, the lashing of [Shaima] is cancelled. Thanks to our beloved king. I am sure all Saudi women will be so happy, I know I am." It seems that the Saudi woman sentenced, has had her punishment overturned by the king. The moves underline the challenge facing Abdullah, known as a reformer, as he pushes gently for change while trying not to antagonise the powerful clergy and a conservative segment of the population.



<http://www.wluml.org/news/saudi-arabia-saudi-woman-be-lashed-defying-driving-ban>

...Eventhough the Shura Council is Reconsidering Driving Issue

In view of the popular campaign for allowing women to drive in the Kingdom, the Shoura Council is thoroughly reconsidering the issue, said Dr. Misha'l Mamdooh Al-Ali, Chairman of the Council's Human Rights Committee. Allowing women to drive does not conflict with Islamic law, he said, adding that the majority of people oppose women driving based on tradition and customs. "It has nothing to do with religion," Al-Ali was quoted by Al-Hayat Arabic daily as saying. Many Saudi women say their driving does not contradict the Shariah and there is no religious reason that prevents them from driving, he added. He said these women have appointed a lawyer to follow up the issue at the Shoura Council.

"The human rights committee is waiting for the Chairman of the Shoura Council to study the case and refer it back to the committee," he said. For more information please check the link

<http://www.wluml.org/news/update-saudi-arabia-shura-council-reconsidering-driving-issue>

In Lebanon

Australia: 'Lebanese-Australian girl goes to court to stop her marriage'

A 16-year-old girl has been placed on an airport watch list in Australia after going to court to prevent her parents sending her to Lebanon for a forced marriage.

The Federal Magistrates' Court ruled that the parents of the teenager, who cannot be named, could not remove or attempt to remove their daughter from the country to marry the young man she has met only once.

Magistrate Joe Harman also ordered that the parents not assault, molest, harass, threaten or otherwise intimidate the girl or take her out of school.

In his judgment, delivered in April but revealed by Australian press on Friday, Harman said the girl's application to prevent her parents from sending her away for the marriage was one that was becoming increasingly common.

"The young person's evidence makes very clear that she has expressed to her parents that she does not want to go to Lebanon and does not want to marry the person proposed," he said. For more info please follow the link <http://www.wluml.org/news/australia-lebanese-australian-girl-goes-court-stop-her-marriage>

In Yemen

First Female Protester Killed in Yemen as Violence Continues

At least seven people were killed by forces loyal to Yemen's president, including the first female protester to die during the nine months of demonstrations against the regime.

In Sanaa, soldiers and armed supporters loyal to Ali Abdullah Saleh killed four protesters during a demonstration where many protesters carried red flowers to signal they intended to conduct a peaceful protest.

A spokesman for the opposition said that 10 soldiers who defected were killed over Saturday and yesterday. That includes two who were slain yesterday afternoon during fighting. More than 57 other protesters were wounded in the clashes, said Dr Mohammed Al Qubati, the coordinator at a makeshift field hospital near Change Square in Sanaa.

The female protester was killed during a large protest in Taiz.

Dr Al Qubati said some protesters in Sanaa were hit by rocket-propelled grenades and anti-aircraft weapons.

"At least 12 cases are in a critical condition," Dr Al Qubati said.

The shooting in Sanaa erupted along the dividing line between parts of the capital held by Saleh forces and those controlled by soldiers under the command of General Ali Mohsen Al Ahmar, who defected from the Saleh regime.

"We will not be scared by your artillery and tanks. We will prosecute the killers," the protesters chanted.

Protest activists and witnesses said snipers on rooftops and security forces opened fire on the crowd of tens of thousands of demonstrators, marching through the streets as they were carrying red flowers and chanting "peaceful ... peaceful" to read the entire story kindly click on the link

<http://www.thenational.ae/news/worldwide/first-female-protester-killed-as-violence-continues-in-yemen>

... and while celebrating peace prize, Yemeni women were attacked

Dozens of women were reportedly injured in Yemen's second-largest city on Sunday after government supporters attacked an anti-government rally celebrating Yemeni activist and [Nobel Peace Prize](#) winner [Tawakkul Karman](#).

According to reports, pro-government "thugs" threw stones at women who were taking part in a peaceful women's march in the south-western city of Ta'izz.

"Yemeni authorities must protect the right to freedom of expression, which includes not tolerating violent attacks on peaceful marches," said Malcolm Smart, Director of Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Program.

"A full, independent and impartial investigation must be carried out to identify and bring to justice all those responsible for wounding dozens of women at the Ta'izz march."

Yesterday's march in Ta'izz was called after last Friday's announcement that Karman, a young Yemeni rights activist, would be among three women to receive the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize.

As a journalist and President of the NGO Women without Chains, Karman has long campaigned against human rights violations in Yemen. She has called on the authorities to protect freedom of expression and women's rights as well as to release political prisoners.

The activist was involved in this year's pro-reform protests in Yemen from a very early stage and was briefly detained for her activism in the capital Sana'a in January. For more information please follow the link <http://bikyamasr.com/45350/celebrating-peace-prize-yemeni-women-attacked/>

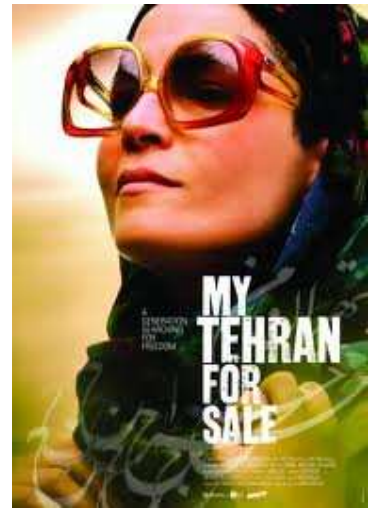


In Iran

Iran sentences film actress to 1 year in prison and 90 lashes

An Iranian court has sentenced an Iranian actress to one year in jail and 90 lashes related to her role in an Australian-made film portraying social alienation, artistic repression and drug use in Iran, according to an Iranian opposition website. "In an outcome that could have been lifted from the pages of the movie's script"--"[My Tehran for Sale](#)"--the film's lead actress, Marzieh Vafamehr, "was arrested in July and received her sentence at the weekend, according to reports quoting Iranian opposition website kalameh.com," the Sydney Morning Herald [reported](#). In the 2009 film, Vafamehr portrays a Tehran actress whose theater work is banned by the authorities and is thus driven to Tehran's cultural underground. Ultimately, she contemplates whether to leave Iran for exile abroad. "Vafamehr often appears with a shaved head and no headscarf in the film, which also explores cultural oppression in Iran and taboos such as drug use," the paper said. To read more of this story please follow the link :

<http://www.wluml.org/news/iran-iran-sentences-film-actress-1-year-prison-and-90-lashes>



...and Iranian activist Narges Mohammadi for 11 years of prison



A prominent Iranian [human rights](#) activist who was taken seriously ill after being detained by the authorities has been sentenced to 11 years in jail. Narges Mohammadi, 39, the deputy head of [Iran's](#) Defenders of Human Rights Centre (DHRC), a rights organisation presided over by the Nobel peace laureate Shirin Ebadi, was picked up last year by security officials who raided her house in middle of the night without a warrant for her arrest.

She was taken to Tehran's Evin prison where she was kept in solitary confinement but was released after a month and taken to hospital.

Mohammadi, a mother of two and winner of the 2009 Alexander Langer award for her human rights activities, has since developed an undiagnosed epilepsy-like disease which causes her to lose control over her muscles temporarily during the day.

It emerged on Tuesday that a court in Tehran has now convicted her on three charges: acting against the national security, membership of the DHRC and propaganda against the regime, for which she has received an 11-year sentence in total.

<http://www.wluml.org/news/iran-iranian-activist-narges-mohammadi-jailed-11-years>

... STEPS FORWARD

In Tunisia

Tunisia is Leading the Way on Women's Rights in the Middle East

Last December, Tunisians rose up against their dictator, triggering a political earthquake that has sent shockwaves through most of the Middle East and north Africa. Now, Tunisia is leading the way once again - this time on the vexed issue of gender equality. It has become the first country in the region to withdraw all its specific reservations regarding CEDAW - the international convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

This may sound a rather obscure and technical matter but it's actually a very important step. It reverses a long-standing abuse of human rights treaties - especially in the Middle East - where repressive regimes sign up to these treaties for purposes of international respectability but then excuse themselves from some or all of their obligations.

Saudi Arabia, for example, operates the world's most blatant and institutionalised system of discrimination against women - and yet, along with 17 other Arab states, it is also a party to CEDAW. It attempts to reconcile this position through reservations saying it does not consider itself bound by any part of the treaty which conflicts "with the norms of Islamic law". For more

information please check <http://www.wluml.org/news/tunisia-tunisia-leading-way-womens-rights-middle-east>

BOOKS & REPORTS

RESOURCES & CALLS

UN Women Fund for Gender Equality Seeks Proposals from Arab States

UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality, a grantmaking fund initiated by Spain and dedicated to advancing women's rights and gender equality, announced its second Call for Proposals, inviting women's organizations and government agencies to apply for grants to support women's political and economic empowerment. In recognition of the recent developments in the Arab States region, which have created additional opportunities for supporting efforts to improve the life conditions of women and girls, the first phase of the Fund's 2011-2012 call will immediately focus on proposals that seek to empower women and their communities in this region.



"UN Women supports the participation and rights of women in the Arab States, and the Fund for Gender Equality can bolster women's empowerment and participation during this time of transition," said Michelle Bachelet, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women. "We hope that these grants support women in their quest for democracy, equality and political participation." UN Women administers and oversees the Fund for Gender Equality.

The Fund has set aside USD 16 million for its 2011-2012 grantmaking cycle, with USD 4 million projected for grants in the Arab States and more if contributions during this grantmaking cycle increase. Grants will start at USD 200,000 for initiatives that make tangible improvements in the lives of women and girls. The Fund will accept proposals from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the occupied Palestinian territory, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Applicants may download the Call for Proposals and Grant Application at <http://www.unwomen.org/fge/application-guidelines/>. The first set of grants will be announced in December 2011. For additional information, visit <http://www.unwomen.org/fge/>

Asia Foundation - Women's Empowerment Program

For more than half a century, The Asia Foundation has been a leader in helping women to realize their potential. They believe that investing in women fundamentally strengthens families and societies. The Women's Empowerment Program develops women's leadership, strengthens women's organizations, increases women's rights and ensures their personal security, and creates new political and economic opportunities for women. The trainings are available through this link <http://asiafoundation.org/publications/index.php?searchType=program&program=2>

Family Planning and Islam by Asghar Ali Engineer

Many people, especially women, have asked me if family planning is permissible in Islam. They say the imams and ulema say the Quran prohibits family planning and quote a verse which says, "And kill not your children for fear of poverty – We provide for them and for you. Surely the killing of them is a great wrong" (17:31). In no way does this verse refer to family planning because it is talking of 'killing' and you kill one who exists. No law in the world will permit killing one who is already born and hence the Quran rightly condemns the killing of children. Some people suggest that the verse in question refers to the practice of burying girl children alive and when asked they would say they could not provide for them and hence Allah responds



that He provides for them. <http://www.dawn.com/2011/10/07/family-planning-and-islam.html>

International Day of Rural Women - UN GA President Message

On the occasion of the International Day of Rural Women, I reaffirm the critical role and contribution of rural women, including indigenous women, in enhancing agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating rural poverty. Rural women are the backbone of the economy and society in many countries. They produce a significant amount of the food in developing countries and play an important role in environmental sustainability. Their contribution to poverty eradication and towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals is significant. But more needs to be done to harness the contribution of rural women to development. Currently there is a gender gap in agriculture, linked to women's weaker access to land rights, modern technologies and financing. If women farmers had stronger legal rights and greater business opportunities, millions of people would be better fed. I therefore encourage Member States, the United Nations system and civil society to continue their efforts to improve the situation and living conditions of rural women, to enhance their quality of life and assist them in achieving the conditions necessary for sustainable development in the rural areas.

I welcome the Commission on the Status of Women's consideration of the "Empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges" as its priority theme during its fifty-sixth session in 2012. To read the entire statement please follow the link http://www.wunrn.com/news/2011/10_11/10_10/101011_international.htm

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