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NEWS & ARTICLES

GENDER ACTIVISM

In Yemen

Yemen women burn veils in Sanaa in anti-Saleh protest

Hundreds of women have set fire to their traditional veils in Yemen in protest at the violence used against anti-government demonstrators. The

women, in the capital Sanaa, made a pile of veils in the street which they then doused with petrol and set alight. Women have played a key part in the uprising against Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh. A Yemeni woman activist, Tawakkul Karman, was joint winner of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize. She received the award for her role in the struggle for women's rights and democracy in Yemen. The veil-burning protest began when a group of women spread a black



cloth across a main street. They threw full-body veils, known as makrama, onto it. As the flames rose, they chanted, "Who protects Yemeni women from the crimes of the thugs?" The Associated Press news agency says they also handed out leaflets appealing for help.

"Here we burn our makrama in front of the world to witness the bloody massacres carried out by the tyrant Saleh," the leaflets read. To read the entire story, please follow the link <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15466661>

In Egypt

One brave woman's fight against virginity-test ordeal in Tahrir Square

Since the beginning of the Arab Spring, Tahrir Square has been an inspiration to pro-democracy activists across the globe. Now one woman is fighting to make sure the public space, which became the focal point of the demonstrations against Hosni Mubarak's government in Egypt, does not become a symbol for state-sponsored misogyny too.

In March, after protesters returned to the square to highlight the slow pace of reform under the interim military government, hundreds were arrested and beaten. And, according to human rights groups, among these were seven women who were slapped, placed in chains, tasered, and then subjected to so-called virginity tests.



An Egyptian general interviewed on an American news channel admitted the examinations of the women's hymens had taken place, declaring: "These girls who were detained were not like your daughter or mine... These were girls who had camped out in tents with male protesters in Tahrir Square and we found... molotov cocktails and [drugs]." Oddly, he claimed the tests were necessary because, "We didn't want them to say we had sexually assaulted or raped them, so we wanted to prove they weren't virgins in the first place," as though only virgins could be raped.

Now one of the women has found the courage to file a case against the military for sexual assault - something Nadia Khalif from Human Right Watch explains is not just brave, but almost unheard of. Not only is there the social stigma of admitting to such a violation in a conservative society, but the military is still in power and few would be willing to put themselves at risk by taking them on. Yet Samira Ibrahim, a 25-year-old who works in marketing, said she was forced to take her clothes off before being subjected to a horrifying ordeal. "The person that conducted the test was an officer, not a doctor. He had his hand stuck in me for about five minutes. He made me lose my virginity. Every time I think of this, I don't know what to tell you, I feel awful", she said to an online newspaper. "I know that to violate a woman in that way is considered rape. I felt like I had been raped."

Khalif says the Egyptian media has failed to cover the case because of the military's power. And she believes that the examinations, along with the threats of charging the women with prostitution, were a blatant attempt to dissuade them from joining in political demonstrations. To read the entire story, please follow the link

<http://www.wluml.org/news/egypt-one-brave-womans-fight-against-virginity-test-ordeal-tahrir-square>

Nude female blogger sparks Egypt outrage

A woman activist who posted nude pictures of herself on her blog to protest limits on free expression has triggered uproar in Egypt, drawing condemnations from conservatives and liberals alike.

Some liberals feared that the posting by 20-year-old university student Aliaa Magda al-Mahdy would taint them in the eyes of deeply conservative Egyptians ahead of Nov. 28 parliamentary elections in which they are trying to compete with fundamentalist Islamic parties.

Nudity is strongly frowned upon in Egyptian society, even as an art form. Mahdy's posting is almost unheard of in a country where most women in the Muslim majority wear the headscarf and even those who don't rarely wear revealing clothes exposing the arms or legs in public.

Mahdy wrote on her blog that the photographs - which show her standing wearing only stockings - are "screams against a society of violence, racism, sexism, sexual harassment and hypocrisy." The blog has received 1.5 million hits since she posted the photos earlier this week. The posting comes at a time when Egypt, a nation of some 85 million people, is polarized between Islamists and liberals ahead of the elections, the first since the February ouster of former President Hosni Mubarak. Members of the most hard-line Islamic movement in Egypt, the Salafis, have warned voters during their campaigns that liberals will corrupt Egypt's morals. "This hurts the entire secular current in front of those calling themselves the people of virtue," Sayyed al-Qimni, a prominent self-described secular figure, said referring to Islamists. "It's is a double disaster. Because I am liberal and I believe in the right of personal freedom, I can't interfere," Qimni said Wednesday night on one of Egypt's popular television political talk shows, "90 Minutes."



The April 6 movement, one of the most prominent liberal activist groups that led the 18-day uprising against Mubarak, issued a statement denying claims by some on the Web that Mahdy is a member of the group.

The posting prompted furious discussions on Internet social media sites, with pages for and against her put up on Facebook. One activist, Ahmad Awadallah, praised her in a tweet, writing: "I'm totally taken back by her bravery." A supporter, who identified himself as Emad Nasr Zikri, wrote in a comment on Mahdy's blog, "We need to learn how to separate between nudity and sex." To read more about this story please follow the link:

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2011/Nov-18/154434-nude-female-blogger-sparks-egypt-outrage.ashx#ixzz1eL3bdsKl>

Manifesto for a Secular Middle East and North Africa

76 secularists and human rights campaigners, including Mina Ahadi, Nawal El Sadaawi, Marieme Helie Lucas, Hameeda Hussein, Ayesha Imam, Maryam Jamil, Maryam Namazie, Taslima Nasrin, Farida Shaheed, Fatou Sow, and Stasa Zajovic have signed on to a Manifesto for a Free and Secular Middle East and North Africa.

Manifesto for a Free and Secular Middle East and North Africa

In light of the recent pronouncements of the unelected Libyan Transitional Council for 'Sharia laws', the signatories of the manifesto vehemently oppose the hijacking of the protests by Islamism or US-led militarism and unequivocally support the call for freedom and secularism made by citizens and particularly women in the region.

Secularism is a minimum precondition for a free and secular Middle East and for the recognition of women's rights and equality. To read the entire Manifesto, please follow the link <http://www.wluml.org/news/mena-manifesto-secular-middle-east-and-north-africa>

In Libya

CLADEM Stands in Solidarity with Women Living Under Muslim Laws

CLADEM (the Latin America and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights, CLADEM) states its deep concern and indignation on account of the public statements made by the National Transition Council (NTC) of Libya on October 23rd last, declaring that the "Sharia" (Islamic Law) shall be a source of legislation for the new regime, establishing the immediate incorporation of polygamy, without any impediments, based on the fact that the Islamic Law does not prohibit it.

We totally agree with the reflections made by Women Living Under Muslim Law (WLUML), who in their statement dated October 25th, manifest that in view of this declaration by the NTC, women shall become the direct target of this change in the laws and will lose many of their acquired rights. Likewise, it is necessary to ask ourselves which will be the "Sharia" that will be applied in Libya, knowing that the laws denominated Islamic, laws that are said to be derived from the Islamic jurisprudence or "Fiqh", or considered in conformity with the Islam, vary enormously from one country to another. The interpretations of this law on the part of the patriarchal system have managed to legitimize the roles, stereotypes, discrimination and violence, which goes against women's human rights.

Libya has acknowledged the supremacy of the CEDAW Convention over the national legislation, which in the General Recommendation N° 21 of the Committee on equality in marriage and in the family relationships, sets forth that polygamy violates women's right to equality with men and could have emotional and economic consequences, very serious for them, as well as for their family members and that it should be discouraged and prohibited. To read the entire statement,



please follow the link <http://www.wluml.org/news/libya-cladem-stands-solidarity-women-living-under-muslim-laws>

GENDER & HUMAN RIGHTS

In Lebanon

The Making of a Secular Democracy: Law, Marriage, and Empirical Irrelevance in Israel and Lebanon'

On any given weekend, Israeli and Lebanese citizens can be found standing together in an orderly line before a Cypriot magistrate. They shuffle forward, couple by couple, in line to get married. The distance to Cyprus is roughly the same for an Israeli or a Lebanese couple, as is the reason why these couples choose to get married there. And no, it is not due to the beautiful weather, the beaches, or the nightlife in Cyprus, which most Israelis and Lebanese would insist to the reader, with a swish of nationalist bravado, are *inferior*. These are not marriages between Lebanese and Israelis. Rather, these couples leave their countries and travel by boat or by plane to a country that has what Israel and Lebanon both lack: a civil marriage law. To put it more simply, they do not have a marriage law that is adjudicated by secular, and not religious, authorities. Despite the fact that interfaith marriages cannot take place in either country, in Lebanon the lack of civil marriage is understood to index both the lack of secularism and liberalism and the primordial and patriarchal nature of the Lebanese state, while Israel continues to enjoy the ideological capital that its status as “the only [secular] democracy in the Middle East” ensures and unleashes.

Lebanon and Israel have similar personal status legal systems. In fact, they are the two Middle Eastern countries that are most alike when it comes to regulating marriages and divorces. Both countries require their citizens to marry under one of several personal status laws that are adjudicated in religious courts. Yet both Israel and Lebanon accept and adjudicate (in judicial courts) civil marriage contracts conducted abroad. But there are exceptions to this exception: in Lebanon two Muslim citizens cannot benefit from civil marriages conducted abroad, while in Israel the same legal exclusion applies to couples made up of two Jewish citizens. To be more precise, these Muslim-Muslim Lebanese couples and Jewish-Jewish Israeli couples can obtain a civil marriage contract abroad and can even register it in their home countries, but at the first hint of legal trouble the Lebanese Shari`a courts and the Israeli Rabbinical courts claim jurisdiction over any marriage contract conducted between two of “its” citizens. In both countries there are broad based and popular movements calling for a national civil marriage law. In both countries religious institutions and patriarchal/capital interests have quashed all such efforts. To read the entire article, please follow the link <http://www.wluml.org/news/israellebanon-making-secular-democracy-law-marriage-and-empirical-irrelevance-israel-and-lebano>

Tunisian's elections

Tunisia's Election through the Eyes of Women

The role of women in the new Tunisia has been a controversial issue throughout the transitional period, with some fearful that they would lose precious rights from the previous era, and others arguing for a return to traditional values. Early on in the democratic transition, an ambitious gender parity law was introduced to ensure women would have a voice in the constituent assembly.

For some, however, this law did not go far enough. There are no gender quotas for seats in the assembly, for example. And most parties have men at the head of the majority of their lists, meaning parity on the campaign



trail is unlikely to translate into parity in the body that will rewrite the country's constitution and appoint a new government.

Al Jazeera's Yasmine Ryan spoke to a diverse range of Tunisian women about how they have experienced the campaign period, and their aspirations for the future. To read the women's opinion please follow the link <http://www.wluml.org/news/tunisia-tunisias-election-through-eyes-women>

...In the name of democracy - What secularists and women have to lose in the Tunisian elections

On the eve of the elections in Tunisia that will shape the future of the country and even that of the Arab world as well, Western do-gooders and Islamic fundamentalists hand in hand rejoice in 'Tunisia's first free elections' and its access to 'democracy'. The recent history of Iran and Algeria have taught us better... And women in Tunisia watch in horror the rise of Muslim fundamentalists, as a possible replication of the Algerian scenario of 1989 .

'Until the Ayatollahs came to power in 1979, Tehran, Istanbul, Beirut, Cairo, Amman, Damascus, Baghdad, Algiers, Tunis and any city in Morocco and even Tripoli, had among their populations the most secular elites.... How was the secular stamp rubbed out in most of these societies in the space of three decades?', asks Saeed Naqvi in an article ('Turmoil in the Arab World: Attack on Secularism') published on October 20 in the Deccan Herald.

The answer is simple: 'By terror', by terrorizing dissenters, - as we have seen in Algeria, with 200 000 victims in ten years time in the 90s. As was the case in Iran. As is now going on in Tunisia. Since the self immolation of young Mohamed Bouzidi on December 18, 2010, in protest against the situation of jobless Tunisian youth - moreover harassed by the police -, what are the facts that the international community and the Left at large chose to ignore or underplay ? The euphoria of 'the people's revolution' systematically eludes the main question: who are 'the people'? What are the political forces at work within it. Who were they, who are they in Tunisia today? Let us judge by their actions. To read the entire historic review, please follow the link <http://www.siawi.org/article2624.html>

Tunisian MP's single-mother comment worries secularists

Tunisia's Islamist Ennahda party, which vowed to pursue moderate policies after it won elections last month, has provoked concern about its radical roots again after evoking the caliphate and criticizing single mothers. Many Tunisians loathed Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's dictatorship for its corruption and allergy to genuine democracy, but his toppled regime once stood out as an Arab state with a progressive approach to gender equality.

Souad Abdelrahim, the sole female member of Ennahda not to wear a headscarf, last week sparked concern that the party might seek to curb women's rights.

She said single mothers were "inconceivable in an Arab Muslim state" and added "they must marry" in order to attain full rights.

The 47-year-old pharmacist, who was touted during the election campaign as the moderate face of Ennahda, banned under Ben Ali, later said she was "misunderstood," and described single mothers as "victims." Tunisia's social network activists, credited with propelling the uprising that ousted Ben Ali in January, promptly labeled Abdelrahim the "Tunisian Sarah Palin" after the conservative former Alaska governor. Then, last Sunday, Hamadi Jebali, the party's No. 2 official who is tipped as a possible prime minister, alarmed some by evoking "the caliphate," an Islamic system of government based on Shariah law. Social network satirists pounced again, producing images of Jebali wearing a regal turban.



Another Ennahda moderate, the lawyer Samir Dilou, tried to persuade the public that his colleagues' remarks were taken out of context, a move consistent with the party's efforts to ease anxiety about its Islamist bend. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2011/Nov-18/154436-tunisian-mps-single-mother-comment-worries-secularists.ashx#ixzz1e300J5OK>

In Morocco

Moroccan Vote Puts Women's Gains to Crucial Test



Credit: Julia Manzerova/J.Man0 on Flickr, under Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0).

Morocco's new constitution offers huge hope for gender equality, including combating a well-documented problem of domestic violence. New members of parliament elected Nov. 25, along with the king, will determine actual change. Morocco's Nov. 25 parliamentary elections are expected to decide if the country's new constitutional provisions for women can go beyond paper gains.

"People are tired of promises," said Fatima Sadiqi, a lecturer at the University of Fes in Morocco and Harvard University. "They want to see things happening on the ground. In order

to apply them you need the infrastructure, schools in rural areas. That's not easy. There should be a serious thought about these issues, and this is the moment. Elections are close." Judges' decisions in Morocco are driven more by laws than constitutional rights. That means the next parliament has the chance, through legislation, to decide the real reach of constitutional reforms approved by a landslide popular vote in July.

<http://www.womensenews.org/story/equalitywomen%E2%80%99s-rights/111120/moroccan-vote-puts-womens-gains-crucial-test>

In Turkey

Turkey far behind for Closing the Gender Gap

Turkey ranks on place 122 of 134 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2011. According to the report, no country was able to close the gender gap completely.

"Turkey (122) occupies the last place in the regional rankings. The country performs above average in the political empowerment of women- primarily women in parliament-and in the educational attainment category, but lags behind in the other two sub-indexes. Turkey ranks among the 10 worst performers in the economic participation and opportunity subindex", the Global Gender Gap Index 2011 published by the World Economic Forum revealed.

The report, issued for the sixth time, scrutinized the situation in 135 countries. Turkey ranks on the 122nd position, leaving only 14 countries further behind.

Northern European countries like Iceland, Norway, Finland and Sweden take the international lead. The research is based on the four pillars of economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment. Mali, Pakistan, Chad and Yemen are making up the rear of the list.

"Overall, 85% of countries make progress between 2006 and 2011 while 15% either deteriorate or remain unchanged".

The situation in Africa and particularly in South America is deteriorating in international comparison. Countries like New Zealand, South Africa, Spain and Sri Lanka moved down in the ranking while countries like Brazil, Ethiopia, Qatar, Tanzania and Turkey improved. Turkey moved up four places from 126th to 122nd position in comparison to last year. For more information please check <http://bianet.org/english/gender/133817-turkey-far-behind-for-closing-the-gender-gap>

The Strong Link between Patriarchy and Capitalism

At the Women Labour Conference in Istanbul on 12/13 November, Heide Hartmann suggested to make home care a part of public services. Yasemin Özgün urged to increase the women's participation in paid labour force.

"People have to get organized to see the world we live in and to understand and change the way how capitalism and patriarchy are being organized" said Heide Hartmann at the Women Labour Conference.

The conference was organized by the Socialist Feminist Collective at the Fındıklı Campus of the Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in Istanbul on 12/13 November.

Yasemin Özgün said in the opening speech that policies and ways should be discussed which would change conditions for women who are stuck in the clamp of paid and unpaid labour. "Women within the collaboration of patriarchy and capital are a cheap, unsecured, flexible and unskilled work force. We would like to discuss how to overcome this vicious circle to open up a possibility for these women to join the paid labour force", Özgün summarized.

To read more about how home care should be covered please follow the link

<http://bianet.org/english/gender/134011-the-strong-link-between-patriarchy-and-capitalism>

In UK

Jobs are a feminist issue. So are legal aid, tax and pensions

It feels as if, for 20 years, the only argument occurring about feminism has been whether or not it has a point - hadn't its purpose already been served, all its battles won? And when young women eschew feminism, thinking it to describe an uneven temper and hairy armpits, does it have any reliable meaning or future?

Luckily, with the obvious proviso that this is also very unlucky for women, this argument has been thoroughly scotched since the coalition government came to power. [Women are hardest hit by the austerity drive](#) and always the losers whenever there's a surge of social conservatism. To read the full article please follow the link

<http://www.wluml.org/news/uk-jobs-are-feminist-issue-so-are-legal-aid-tax-and-pensions>

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

In Tunisia

'Stop the violation of individual liberties' in Tunisia

Following the violence and violations of civil liberties that took place in a number of schools, institutes and universities, when some students and professors were physically attacked or otherwise threatened due to their clothing not being to the "taste" of the perpetrators, the Association of Tunisian Women for Research on Development (AFTURD) expresses its complete disapproval of and condemns these acts which are contrary to the principles of the Republic and of the public and individual freedoms it guarantees. For more information please follow the link

<http://www.wluml.org/news/tunisia-stop-violation-individual-liberties>



... And 'Women Fearful of Islamists' Rise'

Tunisian women poured into the streets armed with the vote, their latest weapon, when the country voted in its first democratic election since a popular uprising unseated former president Zine Abidine Ben Ali, ending his 27-year- long stronghold on the country. However, the moderate Islamist Ennahda Party's landslide victory in the vote Oct. 23 has been a cause of grave concern for a broad spectrum of Tunisian women, who feel that ground gained during their bitter struggle for liberation will be



stolen from under their feet by the rise of a religious leadership in the post- revolutionary period. Fears stoked by the recent attacks by ultraconservative groups known as Salafists on movie theatres and TV stations playing films by women filmmakers have been exacerbated by aggression against teachers and students in universities across the country. Ennahda has gone out of its way to distance itself from the actions of extremists, issuing repeated assurances to the public that their party walks a much more moderate line. "We will respect the Tunisian people's way of life and act to preserve women's rights," Souad Abdelrahim, an elected member of Ennahda's constituent assembly told IPS. To read the entire news please follow the link <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=105823>

In Lebanon

Stigma, legality hamper aid to child abuse victims

When Lama found her children, aged 5 and 7, touching themselves in a sexual way, her first reaction was to give them a slap and tell them that wasn't appropriate behavior. "I asked my son, 'How could you do something like that?' " says Lama. " "Who does that to you?" He started telling me that his dad does that to him ... and the same for the girl. I saw her doing the same thing and at first I hit her then asked her, 'Who does this to you?' and she said, 'Dad.'"



Lama, whose name has been changed to protect anonymity, a pale woman in her 40s wearing a hijab, says she immediately went to her husband and questioned him.

"When I talked to their father, he denied it," she says. "He said ... it was impossible that he would do something like that. He hit the children and said they were lying and coming between us ... He said if they came to me to complain about their dad I should hit them because it's all lies."

After watching a television program about child sexual abuse, Lama says she realized what was happening to her children.

"The last time it happened, he beat the girl up and told me I should punish her if she says something like that ... and if I didn't do it he would divorce me," she says. "I understood after he exerted that much pressure on us that it was true [he had molested them]."

Child welfare professionals say that child sexual abuse is a growing problem in Lebanon. A 2008 study conducted by KAFA (Enough Violence and Exploitation), an NGO that works with victims of sexual abuse, in collaboration with Save the Children Sweden, found that 16.1 percent of children surveyed were victims of some form of sexual abuse.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2011/Nov-16/154217-stigma-legality-hamper-aid-to-child-abuse-victims.ashx#ixzz1e30y1myQ>

In Turkey

1 Case of Domestic Violence every 10 Minutes in Turkey

According to an announcement of the police, almost 80,000 cases of domestic violence were registered in the past 19 months. This means that domestic violence is experienced every ten minutes at homes in Turkey. According to official numbers of the General Police Directorate (EGM), 78,488 incidents of domestic violence were registered in the 19 months between February 2010 and August 2011. Considering that these are the incidents that were officially reported, it means that domestic violence in Turkish families happened once every ten minutes. As reported by Milliyet newspaper, the EGM launched a study together with police directorates of all 81 Turkish provinces to monitor incidents of domestic violence. The number of 78,488 cases of domestic violence within 19 months boils down to 138 incidents per day and approximately six cases per hour which means

one incident every 10 minutes. To read more please follow the link <http://bianet.org/english/children/133928-1-case-of-domestic-violence-every-10-minutes>

RESOURCES & CALLS

CALLS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Announcement of the 1 week intensive Institute about “CEDAW for Change”

Offered in Partnership with International Women’s Human Rights Action Watch-Asia Pacific (IWRAP-AP); This one-week women’s human rights education institute is designed to cultivate a better understanding of the principles of non discrimination and equality as enshrined in CEDAW (*Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women*) and each State’s obligation to respect, protect and fulfill women’s human rights. Participants will be helped to frame whatever issues they are working on within a human rights framework from a gender perspective.

This session stresses the multiplicity of forms of discrimination women from diverse situations experience. During the week we will learn through activities focused around identity and interconnectedness, the complex nature of discrimination, the impact of culture and religion on women’s rights, and activism against discrimination. We will examine case studies that have come before the CEDAW committee and will explore ways in which CEDAW can be used to support local and national level activism through the submission of Shadow Reports by NGOs and through the CEDAW Optional Protocol. Exact dates for June 2012, application and more information are available through this link <http://learnwhr.org/programs/cedaw-for-change/>

BOOKS AND REPORTS

Unleashing the potential of young rural people, improving employment prospects for the young in the MENA region

The Near East and North Africa (NENA) region presents the largest cohort of youth after sub-Saharan Africa, with young people making up 20 per cent of the total population in NENA. This paper, prepared for the 34th session of the IFAD Governing Council, discusses youth participation in the labour force, specific challenges and constraints facing young rural men and women, and successful initiatives that can be replicated.

The paper highlights the following points:

over the next ten years, the number of 15 to 24 year olds is expected to grow by at least 7 million in the NENA region

- today’s young people are better educated than their elders in NENA, but illiteracy and gender disparities in education continue to prevail in poor rural areas of the region. Also, the countries in this region have the highest rates of out-of-school and out-of-work youth
- Youth participation in the labour force was 37 per cent in NENA and 42 per cent in Central and Eastern Europe (non-EU) and CIS countries in 2010.¹¹ The rate of labour force participation is very low compared with international averages and the two regions are thus missing out on the “demographic dividend”.
- only 28 per cent of young women in NENA were participating in the labour force in 2005
- rural young people are employed in farm and off-farm activities in the informal sector - but most young people in agriculture work as unpaid family labour
- young people are affected by unemployment more than any other age category - youth unemployment rate in NENA is 80 per cent higher than the world average
- constraints to growth create barriers to youth employment
- government reforms, policies and programmes to facilitate the entry of young people into productive employment are centred on a strategy for growth and job creation
- the challenge now in both the NENA region and the Central and Eastern European (non-EU) and CIS countries is to create jobs at a time when there is an economic downturn and political

turmoil. To access the full document please follow the link <http://www.eldis.org/go/country-profiles&id=57592&type=Document>

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