



Gender and Development e -Brief / **Issue 115**

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## NEWS & ARTICLES

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### GENDER ACTIVISM

#### In Iran

#### Iranian Women Fight Controversial 'Polygamy' Bill

On a summer night in 2008, the wives of some Iranian members of Parliament started receiving phone calls.

"Would you mind if I married your husband - just for a week?" asked the female voice on the end of the line.

The callers argued that taking another wife is a Muslim man's right. By allowing it, the MPs' wives would be

performing a good Islamic deed. Some of the wives hung up in shock.

But marrying the MPs was the last thing the callers actually wanted. In reality, they were women's rights activists opposed to a controversial "Family Protection Bill" which the Iranian government proposed in 2007.

The activists say they discovered that at least 65 male members of the country's 290-strong parliament had two or more wives. This is despite the fact that polygamy contravenes the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Iran has ratified. Article 23 stipulates that states must ensure that men and women have equal rights when marrying or at the dissolution of marriage.

If passed, "The Family Protection Bill" would reduce Iranian women's rights even further, allowing men to take up to three additional wives without the consent or knowledge of their first spouse. Iranian law currently allows Muslim men to have up to four wives, but only after obtaining a court order demonstrating the permission of the first spouse and his ability to treat them all equally. For women who depend entirely on their husband's income, sharing that with a second, third or fourth wife can mean severe financial hardship.

According to Shi'a Islam, Iranian men can already take any number of "temporary wives" without informing their first wife. The length of a temporary marriage is defined in advance and can last anything from hours to decades. Temporary wives generally face social ostracism, and their children may face difficulties in accessing public services such as education because if the



marriage is unregistered, it may be hard for the mother to prove paternity.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/iranian-women-fight-controversial-polygamy-bill-2011-11-30>

## In Turkey

### Women Working Home-Based Seek their Rights



The Home-Based Working Women 2<sup>nd</sup> National Conference was held in Ankara on from 2 to 4 December. Women from various cities who are working at home gathered in Turkey's capital and said "We are here" to make their work and lives visible.

At the conference, topics like developments in the field of home-based work were discussed as well as the public's responsibility and the results of related researches. Experiences and information were shared on working conditions and organizations in different countries.

The main demand of the conference was the approval of the Home Work Convention of the International Labour Organization (No.177) by the

Turkish government.

The final declaration of the conference pointed to the following issues:

- \* In order to overcome our invisibility, we urgently need more awareness and research carried out by public institutions, local governments and universities.

- \* We want labour unions to become more sensitive, work on this topic and pay more attention to a co-operation with us.

- \* We demand and expect the support given to Turkey by international institutions to be directed towards programs and projects that will increase our visibility.

- \* We want to be visible in government policies; we want our requests to be answered. We want to be part of the co-operation and addressed as a social party in works of public institutions related to home-based work and the development of our rights. Besides, we want to be inside the coordination within the public.

- \* Additionally, we demand to be part of the establishment of units related to gender equality and home-based working women. A budget should be allocated to these units.

- \* A common recognition and standardization of home-based work.

- \* Creating a data based regarding home-based workers.

- \* Legal and bureaucratic difficulties should be eased and the financial burden should be reduced, for example concerning tax exemption, in order to make it easier for us to associate and to support our co-operatives.

- \* Labour, health and work insurance with affordable premiums should be provided by making the necessary legal amendments in laws on labour and social security.

- \* We want the public to come together with us when looking for a job.

- \* We want all public work to give priority to awareness on gender.

<http://bianet.org/english/gender/134545-women-working-home-based-seek-their-rights>

## Zooming on Arab Spring Consequences

### Will the Arab Spring Backfire on Women?

While the Arab Spring has provided women with space to make their voices heard, "It has also become clear that there are real risks, especially [for woman] in places like Egypt and Libya," said Head of Human Rights Watch's Women Division Liesl Gertholtz. "[Arab] women were visible, they went out and demonstrated for changes, but unfortunately right after the ousters of [Tunisian President Zeineddine] Ben Ali and [Egyptian President Hosni] Mubarak, we saw a backlash," added her colleague, Nadya Khalife, the Middle East North Africa researcher in HRW's women's rights division. From Tunisia to Yemen, Libya, Egypt and Syria, NOW Lebanon predicts whether the



Tunisian women hold a banner that reads: "All Together for Our Gains, Don't Touch My CSP [Personal Status Code]." (AFP photo/Salah Habibi)



thousands of Lebanese women work daily to strengthen the national economy but continue to be deprived of their right to pass on their nationality to their families. For more information about this issue please follow the link <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2011/Dec-15/156922-ngo-condemns-cabinets-approval-of-draft-law.ashx#axzz1ga7XwMfv>

### Zooming on Human rights day's

#### Human Rights Day and social media in Lebanon

Each year on 10 December, the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is marked by celebrating International Human Rights Day. This year marks immense changes that swept over the Arab region.

Many found their voices using the internet and instant messaging to inform, inspire and mobilize supporters to seek their basic human rights. Through the transforming power of social media, ordinary people have themselves become human rights defenders.

Three young, active and mobilized Lebanese bloggers and activists in various fields and lobbying for different causes, have shared with us their thoughts on the Human Rights Day and how the social media played a role. To read the 3 short biographies please follow the link: <http://ukinlebanon.fco.gov.uk/en/about-us/working-with-lebanon2/001-human-rights1/#.TuMeQZp055g.twitter>



#### Global conversation on human rights on Human Rights Day 2011

This year thousands of people decided the time had come to claim their rights. They took to the streets and demanded change. Many found their voices using the internet and instant messaging to inform, inspire and mobilize supporters to seek their basic human rights. Social media helped activists organize peaceful protest movements in cities across the globe—in Tunis, in Cairo, in Madrid, in New York, and in cities and towns across the globe—at times in the face of violent repression. It has been a year like no other for human rights. Human rights activism has never been more topical or more vital. And through the transforming power of social media, ordinary people have become human rights activists. Human rights belong equally to each of us and bind us together as a global community with the same ideals and values. As a global community we all share a day in common: Human Rights Day on 10 December, when we remember the creation 63 years ago of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On Human Rights Day 2011 we pay tribute to all human rights defenders and ask you to get involved in the global human rights movement. The High Commissioner for Human Rights hosted a **global conversation on human rights** through social media on Friday, 9 December at 9:30 A.M., New York time. For more information about this event please follow the link [http://www.wunrn.com/news/2011/12\\_11/12\\_05/120511\\_human.htm](http://www.wunrn.com/news/2011/12_11/12_05/120511_human.htm)



### GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

#### In Syria

#### Woman's Story of Family Crises of Crackdown

*The Syrian crackdown has cost 4,000 lives by a U.N. estimate. Maimouna Alammar offers this account--beginning with a strange phone call from her brother--of how it's been devastating her own family.*

(WOMENSENEWS)--I was home alone with my 5-month-old daughter, Emar. My mother and mother-in-law had left. The phone kept ringing. I wanted to break it.

I live in Daraya, a suburb of Syria's capital Damascus. It was Nov. 18, the eighth month of the Syrian revolution. That military home raids have become part of daily life doesn't mean our nerves aren't on edge from it.

Around 6:30 p.m. my brother Suhaib, 22, two years my junior, called.

"I'm coming over."

"Power's out," I said.

The regime shuts off the electricity whenever they're about to clamp down on an area. I wanted him to understand that it wasn't the right

time to visit, but because of the police state, not me. I'd delight in seeing him, and so would the

baby.

The expected hour passed and he did not arrive. The phone rang again. It was my mother, worrying about Suhaib. Dad was still in prison. At dawn on Sept. 17, they'd dragged him off over mom's cries. He has taught nonviolence for decades. I grew up in a family committed to the sacredness of human life.

"Suhaib just called asking what your father-in-law's name is. They must have him at a checkpoint," my mom said.

"I'll call him."

Suhaib answered. From his voice I thought he was OK but, strangely, I couldn't hear the usual bus-stop background noises of a checkpoint.

"I need your father-in-law's name," he said.

I lost it. Suhaib sometimes does and says things at the wrong time. "Why do you need it just now? It's Ahmed, already!"

"I'll be there soon, Maimouna," he said.

### ***A Baby Named 'Freedom'***

I put the baby to bed. My husband, Osama Nassar, had been in prison when Emar was born on June 10. I held off naming her so we could name our first child together. They released Osama June 27. "Emar" is a Sumerian word meaning "freedom."

The doorbell rang. Before I got there, it rang a second time. Whoever was behind the door was impatient. Suddenly I wondered if it could be state police. I peeked through the hole: Suhaib stood there. It was dark; I barely saw the frown on his face. Behind him, on the landing, was another figure that I didn't examine closely.

As I started to open the door, a huge, lightly-bearded middle-aged man who'd been hiding shoved his way in, holding a gun against Suhaib's head.

"Where is your husband," he screamed.

I tried to push the door shut against him, saying, "Wait! I'm not dressed! Wait until I put on my headscarf." I ran to the bedroom for it.

He was right behind me, gripping Suhaib. Another armed man started searching the house.



Maimouna Alammar and her husband

*Credit: Maimouna Alammar's family members*



Maimouna Alammar's brother Suhaib, who is currently imprisoned.

*Credit: Maimouna Alammar's family members*

The large bearded man, pointing the gun at Suhaib, asked, "Where's your husband?"

"I don't know. He's left the house."

"When?"

"He had been detained. After they released him, he left the house."

He sneered with mockery. "Oh, detained? Does that mean he has an opinion and a conscience?"

I didn't reply. Did an agent in a police state know the meaning of having an opinion or the significance of having a conscience?

He said, "Your husband killed three government security agents."

"My husband didn't kill anyone. My husband doesn't believe in killing." Osama and I met through attending nonviolence study circles. His whole life has been about believing that people can change themselves and their world nonviolently.

He snapped, "I will kill you."

***'Killing Isn't the Answer'***

Emar stirred in her crib. "Killing isn't the answer," I said.

He said, calmer, "You're against killing? So what's the answer, in your view?"

I felt that my words woke the human side in him. I said, "We shouldn't shed blood."

Maybe he forgot himself for a moment. In a police state the police are not supposed to engage with citizens; it might bring a sense of humanity to the interchange. Emar gurgled.

The man leaned over her crib--that's when my heart dropped--and picked up my cell phone, which lay on my bed.

Emar smiled at me, eyes wide and curious. If this were happening in the city of Homs, my baby likely would have been killed at this point in a home raid. My 7-year-old cousin, Zuhair Alammari, was killed while playing in a field in Dara in May by government security agents just like this one.

"What do I press to find your husband's number?"

I didn't say anything. I looked him in the eye, trying to call out any goodness in him.

"If you won't answer me, we'll take your baby daughter until your husband surrenders."

"For shame," I said, picking up Emar, thinking, over my dead body. I looked at him over her soft cheek. "Please don't."

He said, "Then isn't it also wrong to kill people?"

I said, "We didn't kill any. We don't kill people."

He replied, "OK. I'm leaving her with you, just to show I'm human."

I lucked out. Loyal Askar, Ola Jablawi, Hamza Khatib, Tamer Share, Ibrahim Shayban, my cousin Zuhair--these are a few of the murdered children of Syria; names I know both from personal contacts and press reports.

The man then grabbed Suhaib's arm. "If your husband doesn't surrender, I'll bring your brother back in a coffin."

I wanted to throw my arms around Suhaib, to stop them from taking him, but there was Emar to think about. I could put myself between Emar and the police, or Suhaib and the police, but not both.

I at last blurted, "My brother didn't do anything. It's my husband you want. Leave my brother alone!"

Suhaib called out to me: "Maimouna, tell..." but was silenced by a slap and a loud, "Shut up, idiot!"

I will tell the world for you, brother. God protect you.

My brother was taken away and is still in prison.

God help all my brothers, all my sisters, all our children in Syria. To read the full story please follow the link [http://www.wunrn.com/news/2011/12\\_11/12\\_05/120511\\_syria.htm](http://www.wunrn.com/news/2011/12_11/12_05/120511_syria.htm)

## **In Egypt**

### **Egyptian Human Rights Organizations Stop their Participation in an International Campaign Against Gender Based Violence**

A part of the Joint Statement:

“Today marks the International Day for The Elimination of Violence Against Women, and we as feminist organizations wanted to take part in the 16 days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence Campaign by organizing events in Egypt, especially that this year’s theme is challenging *Militarism and Ending Violence against Women*. This year’s theme was a chance for us to draw attention on the current situation in Egypt and how living under military rule contributes greatly in escalating violence against women by reinforcing patriarchy.

We started planning several activities based on this year’s theme, however, due to the current circumstance and the violations committed against protestors, the organizations signing this statement decided not to take part in the campaign, and to join the protests against police and military forces brutality, and the abuses by the ruling authorities”. To read the statement follow the link <http://www.wluml.org/news/egypt-egyptian-human-rights-organizations-stop-their-participation-international-campaign-again>

### Female Protesters Systematically Targeted in Egypt

Local human rights watchdogs accused the Egyptian military of systematically targeting female political activists, and demanded that Egypt’s military rulers admit to violations committed against demonstrators. In a joint statement, five human rights

organizations accused military rulers of exercising "unprecedented violence against protesters, with the targeting of female activists being a distinctive feature of the proceedings to disperse sit-ins, as depicted in pictures and video clips showing protesters being arrested, beaten, dragged and stripped of their clothes." In this [video](#), army soldiers are seen beating an older female activist named Khadiga al-Hennawy. While this [video](#) shows army soldiers dragging, beating and striping a female protester in the street. The statement argued that the army’s decision to target female activists "is a continuation and escalation



of a clear militarization policy against female human rights defenders, which was adopted by the former regime, and which is continuing after the 25 January revolution." "The frequency of the violence by the armed forces and the police is not a coincidence, but rather a pattern and a policy," the statement added. For more information <http://www.wluml.org/news/egypt-female-protesters-systematically-targeted>

### In Saudi Arabia

#### 'It's time to abolish the lashing penalty' in Saudi Arabia

I realize that this is another very sensitive subject, but I would like to make an important point in order to dispel any confusion or misunderstanding. When I discuss a matter having religious implications, I do not mean to criticize the divine Islamic religion itself nor the positive achievements realized by Saudi Arabia, of which I can only express admiration, respect and my sincere devotion. However, I will criticize the wrongful practice of the religion when it betrays Islam's fundamental principle of human rights. My role as a writer is to speak out, no matter how sensitive the subject and try and stimulate my readers' thinking. I am not trying to impose my ideas on anyone, since it is up to the reader to decide what to believe. I do





believe, however, that my articles serve a public purpose in promoting discussion among concerned citizens who can accept or reject my arguments as they see fit. Having said this, I am fully aware that the penalty of lashing (like any other Islamic punishment) is a very sensitive issue for most people. Nevertheless, and in addition to the serious moral implications of such punishment, I must speak out because unless lashing is abolished, the image of Saudi Arabia will be profoundly and negatively impacted. For more information <http://arabnews.com/opinion/letters/article536124.ece>

### Law May Fine & Shame for Sexual Harassment

Zain al Abideen, a member of the Shoura council, which has the power to propose laws to the



King, urged "the council to follow the example of countries like Kuwait and the UAE, where similar laws have successfully deterred unwelcome advances", the Arabic newspaper Al Sharq Al Awsat reported.

The legal development comes at a time when there has been an increase in complaints over harassment in the Kingdom, with streets such as Al Elaya Street in Riyadh and Al Tahliya Street in Jeddah being cited as spots for women to avoid.

There are frequent reports in Saudi media about women being harassed. From men accosting women in the streets to harassment in the work place, it is a huge problem.

A survey conducted in 2009, Harassment and Challenges Faced by Saudi Women Working with Men, focused on 1,000 Saudi women working in a wide range of fields, from medicine and education to banking and the media.

It found that 21 percent of respondents had been subjected to unsolicited forms of friendliness from their superiors and 35 percent from colleagues in similar, or lower, positions.

Many of the survey respondents also complained about colleagues making unsolicited flirtatious comments, with 28 percent complaining about unwanted requests for meetings outside the work place, 24 percent of them having been unnecessarily contacted late at night and 15 percent revealing that the harassment they experienced extended to actual physical contact.

More worryingly, most of the women who took part in the survey said the harassment caused them to worry about the possibility of losing their jobs or acquiring a bad reputation.

If the new law goes ahead, they would have some recourse and men found guilty of harassing women could face punishments ranging from public shaming and fines to three years imprisonment in the most serious cases.

Under the proposed legislation, sexual harassment is defined as an "honour crime". Its legal definition, which includes gestures and speech, also does not require for physical contact to have taken place in order for an offence to have occurred.

Managers should also beware that, if the law proceeds, demanding female employees to stay late at the office under the pretext of overtime can also leave themselves open to a charge of sexual harassment. For more information follow the link

[http://www.wunrn.com/news/2011/12\\_11/12\\_05/120511\\_saudi.htm](http://www.wunrn.com/news/2011/12_11/12_05/120511_saudi.htm)

### In Afghanistan

#### Afghanistan: 'Afghan TV Challenges Attitudes Towards Domestic Violence'

Afghanistan has been called one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a woman, and much of that danger lies in the home. According to the United Nations, more



than 87 per cent of all women there suffer from domestic violence. But now, a radical television show is challenging attitudes to this abuse, inviting women to speak candidly and anonymously about their problems at home.

From Kabul, Tahir Qadiry reports. Please go to the BBC link below to see the video report.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-15447047>

For more information <http://www.wluml.org/news/afghanistan-afghan-tv-challenges-attitudes-towards-domestic-violence>

## In Turkey

### Troublesome Life of Co-Wives in South-Eastern Turkey



According to a research by the Silopi Viyan Women Solidarity Centre, "co-wives" as the second or third wife of one man at a time are usually being married when they are under 20 years old. Most of them come from Syria and Irak and stay mainly because of their children.

The Silopi Viyan Women Solidarity Centre carried out a research into the situation of so-called "co-wives", i.e. the wives of a man who is married to two or three women at the same time.

The research was conducted with women living in Silopi, a city in the province of Şırnak in the predominantly Kurdish region at the south-eastern tip of Turkey with borders to Iraq and Syria. It reveals important data on the living conditions of women from Turkey and abroad who came/were brought to the country as second or third wives.

Just under two thirds (63 percent) of the women who came from abroad as second wives got married when they were younger than 20 years of age. 32 percent are illiterate. With 90 percent, the vast majority of these women do not work. The ones who do work are helping out in vineyards, gardens and agricultural fields owned by the family.

70 percent of the first wives with Turkish citizenship are illiterate. 80 percent of them got married under 20 years of age. More than one third (35 percent) of first wives in polygamous relationships have more than seven children.

They are treated violently but cannot talk about it: 80 percent of the women coming from abroad know the Kurdish language. Nevertheless, 50 percent of them have difficulties in communicating due to different dialects.

If they are not married formally, the co-wives are living in Turkey without official documents. Hence, they are not able to talk to anybody in case they are experiencing violence or other forms of rights violations. Their children are being registered in the names on other co-wives with Turkish citizenship or on behalf of their mother in law in order to be able to benefit from the official system.

N.F., a woman who came from Iraq as a second wife, recalled, "I got married when I was 14 years old. My life in Iraq was better considering the situation of my family, women rights, going out or gender equality. It is very difficult for me here. I am not officially married. My children are registered in the name of another co-wife (...)"

L.D. who came to Turkey from Syria said, "I am 22 years old. I am not officially married. I came without official papers. I cannot go out of the house because of this problem; I cannot talk to anybody (...) The lives of the women here are very problematic and just desperate".

According to the study, one quarter (25 percent) of the first wives and 21 percent of the second or third wives are being treated violently by their husbands. However, the actual numbers are estimated much higher since 44 percent of the women who participated in the research said in other contexts that they were not able to talk to anybody about the violence they were experiencing. For more information please follow the link

<http://bianet.org/english/gender/134572-troublesome-life-of-co-wives-in-south-eastern-turkey>

## Can Turkey Make Its Mosques Feminist?

A campaign to make Istanbul's roughly 3,100 mosques more welcoming for women could set off a gender revolution in Turkey's places of Islamic worship - and one that may not be uniformly welcomed.

"This is about mosques being a space for women," declared Kadriye Avcı Erdemli, Istanbul's deputy mufti, the city's second most powerful administrator of the Islamic faith. "When a woman enters a mosque, she is entering the house of God and she should experience the same sacred treatment. In front of God, men and women are equal; they have the same rights to practice their religion."

As part of the "Beautification of Mosques for Women" project, Erdemli sent 30 teams to visit all of Istanbul's mosques and report back on the

facilities for women. What the teams found was shocking, she claimed. "Many of the mosques have no toilets for women, no place for women to wash before praying," Erdemli recounted. "Most of the places allocated for women were used as storage places, and those that weren't were usually filthy and freezing cold in winter."

Istanbul's mosques are now under strict instructions to clean up and provide equal facilities for both men and women by February 2012. But it's not only a push for cleanliness and improved sanitation that is underway. The way mosques are arranged is also being changed, according to Erdemli. "In most mosques, the women's area was divided by a curtain or a wall, and this is not fair," she elaborated. "They are sacred places and women have the right to take advantage of their spiritual feeling as well" For more information please follow the link

<http://www.wluml.org/news/turkey-can-turkey-make-its-mosques-feminist>



## RESOURCES & CALLS

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### BOOKS AND REPORTS

**Gulf Countries - Analysis for Women's Progression, Empowerment**



The Gulf Cooperation Council - GCC - is a political and economic union of the Arab states bordering the Persian Gulf and constituting the Arabian Peninsula, namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates.

Their expanding presence in the labor market is indicative of the changes taking place in the region.

Although the journey along the road to the empowerment of women in the Gulf region has sometimes been slow, it is now surely under way, through forward steps of positive reforms, as more female voices are being heard. These voices reflect the motivation, determination and ambition of all those women who are striving to become active members in society and in building their country. Today, women in the GCC region are taking on increasingly prominent roles, becoming decision-makers, participating in the public field as educators, professors, university deans, businesswomen, bankers, medical professionals, scientific researchers and government ministers. Through their achievements, they are exerting a positive influence on society and moving beyond the traditional confinements of home and family.

Major positive changes and development have occurred during the past decades in the status of GCC women. The education of women and their expanding presence in the labor market provide some of the best measures of progress in the region. Education is one of the most powerful tools for the empowerment of women and a catalyst for economic and social change. Investment in educational opportunities for girls will give us the best returns, especially when the focus is on the quality of that education, the methodology and the training provided to young women throughout their life.

GCC governments have invested heavily in education, which as result has become widespread, and significant progress has been made toward achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education. They have made commendable efforts to achieve gender equality among school students and provided considerable financial assistance to female students in all areas and stages of education.

According to UNESCO, in 2009, the net enrolment ratio – that is, the ratio of girls of official school age in primary education – reached 97 percent in Bahrain, 87 percent in Kuwait, 77 percent in Oman, 93 percent in Qatar, 85 percent in Saudi Arabia, and 89 percent in the UAE.

Similarly, the net enrolment ratio in secondary education also increased and reached 91 percent in Bahrain, 81 percent in Oman, 96 percent in Qatar, 76 percent in Saudi Arabia (2007) and 84 percent in the UAE. To read more please follow the link [http://www.wunrn.com/news/2011/12\\_11/12\\_05/120511\\_gulf.htm](http://www.wunrn.com/news/2011/12_11/12_05/120511_gulf.htm)

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