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ANNEXES

A Practical Guide for Media Professionals Covering the Political Transitions in the Arab World



2012 | WHERE ARE THE
W O M E N ?

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ANNEXES TO THE GUIDE 'WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?' A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR MEDIA PROFESSIONALS COVERING THE POLITICAL TRANSITIONS IN THE ARAB WORLD

The EMHRN gender media guide entitled «Where are the Women? A Practical Guide for media professionals covering the political transitions in the Arab World»¹ is designed for you as a media professional, whether you are a journalist, an editor, a blogger or a programme producer. This hands-on Guide gives you interesting ideas for new angles for your media coverage of the transitions taking place in the Arab world in the wake of the revolutions, uprisings and reforms that began in 2011. An excellent tool that provides you with useful tips and gender-friendly reminders to consider when you write your story about violations, governments, elections and constitutions. Written in clear and simple language, our guide offers suggestions on how to broaden your contact lists and provides valuable resources and links from which you can draw significant input to your media work.

If 'Where are the Women?' raised your interest in gender sensitive reporting, we hope you will regard it as the 'Meze' – the taster to stimulate your appetite. We have designed the following annexes to provide you with additional, more in-depth information, ideas and examples of media work and gender:

[Annex 1 answers the question: Why mainstream Gender in the Media during Political Transitions?](#)

[Annex 2 gives a check-list for Media Portrayal of Women in the Transitions.](#)

[Annex 3 highlights sexist stereotypes in the Media – and gives examples of how to challenge them.](#)

[Annex 4 outlines legal commitments to gender mainstreaming and women's rights in the Media.](#)

[Annex 5 provides a short overview by country \(Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria\) of women in revolutions and the challenges they face in transitions.](#)

¹ The EMHRN Gender Media Guide: http://www.euromedrights.org/eng/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/GenderMediaGuide_EN_30NOV2012.pdf

WHY MAINSTREAM GENDER IN THE MEDIA DURING POLITICAL TRANSITIONS: Making the voices of Women heard

Role of women in Arab States

In the wake of the Arab uprisings for democracy and human rights, the absence of women in discussions about the future is de facto Media censorship of the views of over half the population. It is well known that women played an important role in the 'Arab Awakening' revolutions but in the aftermath, women's participation and their opinions have been side-lined from the discussions on the future and from much of the Media coverage.

What role have women played in the Arab revolutions and transitions?

Defying their stereotype as victims of oppressive patriarchies, women made their presence a defining feature of the Arab Awakening uprisings, in the front lines and in support roles. Women marched, chanted, 'rabble-roused', organised, provided medical support, raised funds, blogged, were spokespersons, smuggled ammunition, went on hunger-strike, protected their men-folk and families, suffered abuse, beatings, kickings, rape and torture. Some even paid the price of such an active contribution with their lives.

Women and social media

During the uprisings and transition women and men have used social media and blogs as a platform for speaking out freely against oppression and injustice. Radio Deutsche Welle's prestigious 7th Annual World-Wide Blog Awards **BOBS** was given to the Egyptian blogger Eman Hashem for her blog *The Violet Revolution* covering issues related to Egypt after the revolution. Radio Deutsche Welle also recognised the following blogs by Arab women as some of the best world-wide: Syrian blogger Shireen Al Hayek for her blog *Chalk*; Egyptian journalist Mona Eltahawy's blog on politics, life and culture in the Arab world and Lina Ben Mhenni's blog *A Tunisian Girl*. Ben Mhenni blogs in French, Arabic and English, and writes about politics and social activism. She travelled around Tunisia documenting protests on her blog and posting up photographs of the dead and wounded.²

*Social media and mobile phones are causing an Arab Revolution for women's minds and lives. Blogger Yorikiri writes: «The introduction of mobile phones was a first big step - finally one could have some privacy in families set up for control. But social media is a breakthrough. In a society where women and men are physically and even visually separated, the fact that you can talk to men online, that you can exchange thoughts and pictures, is like a sociological tsunami. How long can you demand that women get the approval of men to travel abroad, when their friends online can travel freely? How long can you demand that women shouldn't become doctors or exercise any other time-consuming job because it would leave them with too little time for raising the kids and taking care of their husbands?».*³

2 Samya Ayish Monday, 09 May 2011 Global Arab Network. www.english.globalarabnetwork.com/2011050910906/Media/arab-women-bloggers-in-the-era-of-transitions-the-power-of-new-Media-at-work.html

3 <http://yorikirii.blogspot.com/2011/05/real-arab-revolution.html>

In the transitions, women have used social media to raise awareness about abuse against women. The Voice of Libyan Women's Psychological Abuse Campaign had a phenomenal response.⁴

What are the challenges women face?

Getting women's voices heard

«In the immediate aftermath of the revolutions there was a great interest in women's rights, but now you hardly see a mention of women's rights and women's participation». Rabea Naciri.⁵

The major challenge for women? Getting women's voices heard in discussions. As post- revolution countries turn their attention to elections, new governments, new parliaments, amended legislation, including to the Family Status Law, new Constitutions, and security system reforms, the public debates and decisions in the media appear to be «for men only».

Women's rights have been deliberately linked with the old dictatorships as a way of making any discussion on equal opportunities for women socially unacceptable topics. Lawyer Ahlem Belhaj, President of Tunisian Association of Democratic Women, says: 'Partly it's a reaction to the way the former regime used women's rights, and partly it's a concession to the Islamists. There is a lack of any debate about women's rights, certainly in terms of how to take them forward'.⁶

At the height of the revolutions men welcomed women as partners in the struggle for democracy. But once the dictators were ousted, women were disappeared again.

4 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMhwf7xFPPo&feature=youtu.be>

5 Rabéa Naciri is a prominent Moroccan women's rights activist and former President of the Association Démocratique du Femmes du Maroc (ADFM).

6 <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/08/201181617052432756.html>

But how so?

› Transition Governments and new Governments

Transition Governments and new Governments have been predominantly male. Women have been given minimal opportunity to participate.

› Politics and religion have become closely intertwined

The overwhelming victories of Ennahda in the Tunisian elections and the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis in the Egyptian elections have sparked fears among many women about negative consequences for women's rights and gender equality, especially Family Status legislation. For example arguments in favour of polygamy has re-appeared on the agenda after many years absence.⁷

› Gender balance in elections and politics

In post-revolution elections traditional practices favoring male candidates prevailed. Most political parties did not place women's names very high up on their parliamentary election candidate lists leaving them hardly a chance to win, or as candidates for non-winnable constituencies. If women are not elected in sufficient numbers women as a whole are denied a voice in deciding on reforms to Constitutions and legislation which concern their countries' entire future.

› Why Women's rights in Constitutions?

Once women's rights are guaranteed in a constitution they can be fought for in the courts of justice over the years ahead. A challenge in each country is how to get women's human rights enshrined. For example, women are entitled to inherit only half as much as men. Husbands may divorce their wives in moments in front of a civil servant. Women endure lengthy court proceedings to do the same. A woman who remarries loses the right to custody of her own children.

› What are the Opportunities?

'Women in Arab nations who have put their safety on the line are the true heroes. Each of these women is making us realise that change can happen. But it isn't going to be easy. That is probably the biggest message coming from the Arab Spring. Women are trying to impact and change the caretakers of corrupt governments'. Blogger Lys Anzia.⁸

7 <http://www.economist.com/node/21532256?frsc=dg%7Ca>

8 January 2012 <http://vitalvoices.org/blog/2012/01/womens-voices-arab-spring-lys-anzia>

Women are fighting back. The mushrooming of new civil society organisations and social media offers opportunities to bring about progress on gender equality and women's rights. Women's organisations also offer unparalleled useful sources for journalists who want to keep abreast of day-to-day developments. They should form an important part of every journalist's list of contacts.

We may see a regaining of self-confidence in Arab countries harnessed to divert the argument away from the mistaken perception that gender equality and women's rights are a western concept.

MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE TRANSITIONS

Who sets the news agenda?

As a journalist or blogger, you are the person who sets the news agenda. Yet in the Middle East only 10% of these stories represent women's voices and only 2% of stories highlight gender equality or inequality issues.⁹

The news agenda depends on your choice of:

- ✓ how you cover news stories
- ✓ what you consider an important item (and what you consider unimportant)
- ✓ who you interview
- ✓ who you invite as guests on your TV or radio programme
- ✓ your selection of images to illustrate stories
- ✓ your decision about where stories should be placed (on what pages or which item in the news line-up on radio and television)

⁹ The 2010 Global Media Monitoring Project in the Middle East: http://www.whomakesthenews.org/images/reports_2010/regional/Middle_%20East.pdf.

SEXIST STEREOTYPES IN THE MEDIA – AND HOW TO CHALLENGE THEM

Many Arab women complain about negative portrayal in conventional media. They say that far too often women are 'objectified' and 'commodified'. It is even said there has been an increase in violent and pornographic images of women. Back in 2005 a report said the image of women's bodies portrayed as sexual commodities or a vehicle of sexual arousal was the top image used in the Arab media, followed by an image of women who are in some way immoral. Other negative images included the portrayal of women as being illiterate, of limited intellectual capability, inexperienced, materialistic, opportunistic, weak, or dependent.¹⁰

One frequent knee-jerk perception by editors, talk show hosts and journalists is their assumption that 'experts' and political pundits are predominantly men. A few women may be invited on TV or radio or in the press as an authority or expert but not often enough to challenge this prejudiced perception of women's political skills and expertise. The 2010 Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) surveyed news stories in the Middle East media. Shockingly, the survey found that 80% of invited experts on TV and Radio programmes were men and nearly 90% of spokespersons were also men.

Visual images can reinforce stereotypes

The visual image of the uprising in Libya from pictures in newspapers and on TV mostly revolved around the theme of macho insurgents perched on combat trucks with guns and grenade launchers. This iconography of an all-men revolution has persisted into the transition era. But in reality, Libyan women played a multiplicity of roles in the revolution.

Cartoon titled 'Anyone here knows how to repair a State?' unintentionally reinforces the concept that it's only men who will decide on building the future State institutions.¹¹

Stereotypes in Middle East Media

The GMMP charts the representation of men and women in news media around the world based upon a random sample study on a set date. In 2010 a total of 108 countries took part in the 'Who Makes the News?' study. Appropriate Communication Techniques for Development (ACT-Egypt) and the Coptic Evangelical Organisation for Social Services (CEOSS) collaborated in coordinating participation in the 2010 GMMP in the Middle East. Project findings showed that the majority of news in the Middle East reinforces gender stereotypes.



© Chappatte in «International Herald Tribune» - www.globecartoon.com

¹⁰ Arab Media from a gender perspective: The publication draws on the findings of three reports published between 1995 and 2005. http://www.cawtar.org/evenement_details.php?code=16&evenement=8&page=1

¹¹ http://monde-arabe.arte.tv/en/patrick-chappatte-free-libya-3/chappatte_article-3/

81% of stories supported stereotypes, 14% neither challenged nor supported stereotypes and only 4% challenged stereotypes. Major news topics which reinforced gender stereotypes included the economy (83%), politics/government (81%), crime/violence (78%) and social/legal (72%).¹²

Challenging stereotypes

You can start by looking at your own media house.

Who controls the news, current affairs and political agenda in your media house? Who sets the media agenda? Are they His priorities? Or Her priorities?

Do women and men in your TV station/radio station/newspaper/publication have equal input? 33% of all news reporters in the Middle East are women. According to the GMMP, news produced by women journalists is much more likely to challenge gender stereotypes than those by men journalists.¹³

What role does media play?

Media can be a catalyst for positive imagery of women

Dramatic visual images in mainstream media and social media showed women of all ages and all types of dress, marching and demonstrating for regime change, an end to repression and the release of loved ones. On blogs, TV, Facebook, radio, and photos in the printed press, the world watched and listened to women delivering speeches to the crowds, treating the injured, feeding and providing medicine and medical care to the sit-ins of Cairo and rebel fighters of Libya and Tunisia, and the streets of Syria.

Media can be a channel for prejudiced perceptions and narrow tunnel vision

Many journalists work in contexts where gender-based stereotypes in the media still prevail.

State propaganda departments and political movements linked to extremist religious groups have used media stereotypes of women as a tool to inflame public opinion. Certain parts of the media and extremist blogs and web-sites have been used to incite violence and harassment against women protestors and to ostracise progressive women who do not submit to certain codes of dress and behaviour. In the run up to elections progressive women were made easy targets for ridicule or (sexual) violence. (On the other side liberal minded media promote stereotypes of women who have chosen to support political Islamist groups as being forced to do so, as ignorant etc).

¹² http://www.whomakesthenews.org/images/reports_2010/regional/Middle_%20East.pdf

¹³ http://www.whomakesthenews.org/images/reports_2010/regional/Middle_%20East.pdf

Stereotyping can be a dangerous weapon and not just in the media. In May 2011, a senior Egyptian General attempted to justify virginity tests inflicted on women protesters by labeling female protestors as women from a group who were somehow unworthy of the same respect as other women. Revealing a disturbing attitude, the General said, «The 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».¹⁴

Media can make women disappear like magic

It is not always biased coverage that damages women. The absence of any coverage at all can be just as damaging.

Case example Tunisia - Media making women invisible in the transition

Faiza Skandrani, founder of post-revolution civil society group 'Equality and Parity', says women's rights activists in Tunisia face a conservative backlash that is drowning out other perspectives in the media. «It is very difficult for us women to have our voices heard, whether on the TV or the radio».¹⁵

Question: How can media support and strengthen women's roles in transitions?

Making women visible is a good start

When journalists and bloggers communicate messages on political participation, women's human rights, gender-based violence and social justice - those issues are better understood, better accepted, and better addressed in public policy debates contributing to the overall goal of development, human rights, and democracy. Media can support and strengthen women's roles in transitions by including women in mainstream coverage of all political issues. When women are absent, the question should be 'Where have all the women gone?'

Under the headline 'Where have all the women gone?' journalist Tangi Salaün wrote about the 2011 Egyptian Elections. He said:

'The distribution of seats from the proportional vote will no doubt enable some women to join the Assembly, but only on the side-lines. No Party felt it appropriate to include many more than one or two women (the mandatory quota) on its electoral lists, and not always in a winnable position.....you'd have thought that the revolution (in which women took part in great numbers, often on the front line) would have prompted a shift in outlook. Wrong!

¹⁴ <http://www.economist.com/node/21532256>

¹⁵ <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/08/201181617052432756.html>

Not even the young revolutionaries seized the opportunity. Right from the first meeting following the fall of Hosni Mubarak, women were kept away from the platforms and from the decision-making process, to the fury of those who fought for true equality'.¹⁶

Recognise and acknowledge the multiplicity of women's roles

'The role of the woman in Libya, she is the Muslim, the mother, the soldier, the protester, the journalist, the volunteer, the citizen'. This headline in an opposition newspaper gave positive recognition to women's roles during the uprising against Gaddafi. Media can help by recognising and acknowledging the multiplicity of women's roles in a positive style. At times of revolution and conflict gender roles rapidly change.

A summary of how Gender roles changed in the uprisings

- › Women became leaders in democracy and peace campaigns and grass roots organisations and spokespeople
- › Women became combatants and provided essential support functions during the uprising (e.g. medical supplies, fund-raising, intelligence gathering, communications, mobilising, smuggling ammunition)
- › Women become heads of household - providers and protectors of families
- › Men became combatants and went away to fight
- › Men or women found themselves caring for injured family members

A summary of how Gender roles changed in the uprisings

- › Women/men become socially and economically dependent on ex-combatants
- › Women undertook work formerly done by men
- › Women and men became migrants and refugees
- › Women and men became widowed
- › Men and women were tortured/raped

LEGAL COMMITMENTS TO GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE MEDIA

Although it may not be widely or sufficiently known, there are international and regional commitments for gender equality in the media.

International and Regional Commitments to Gender Equality in the Media

INTERNATIONAL

› ***UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)***

Article 5 of the Convention on sex role stereotyping and prejudice calls for:

‘all appropriate measures to be taken to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women’.¹⁷

› ***The UN Beijing Platform for Action 1995***¹⁸

The UN Beijing Platform (agreed by UN Member States at the 4th UN Conference on Women at Beijing) identified women and the media as one of 12 critical areas of concern. The Beijing Platform for Action says gender stereotyping in advertising and the media is one of the factors of inequality that influences attitudes towards equality between men and women. It emphasises the important role of awareness by media education and responsible guidelines.¹⁹

REGIONAL

› ***Istanbul Marrakesh Process***

Ministers of the Euro-Mediterranean partners met in Istanbul in 2006 at the Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society and adopted the Istanbul Conclusions.²⁰ In the Second Ministerial Conference in Marrakesh in 2009, they reconfirmed their commitments

17 <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>

18 And the outcome document of June 10 2000, containing a political declaration and «Further Actions and Initiatives to Implement the Beijing Platform for Action»: http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2000/20000610_ga9725.doc.html

19 <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf> page 99.

20 http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/women/docs/conclusions_1106.pdf

and adopted the Marrakech Conclusions. The latter states:

‘Equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life is a crucial element of democracy. Only by the inclusion of all and determined actions will the Euro-Mediterranean region’s women be able to fulfil their ambitions and aspirations and, by extension, contribute towards the attainment of a common area of peace, stability and shared prosperity in the Euro-Mediterranean region. This goal, based on democracy, respect for human rights and sustainable development, can only be achieved by guaranteeing all women full enjoyment of human rights’.

It confirmed partners’ commitment to adopt «measures to achieve gender equality, preventing all forms of discrimination and ensuring the protection of the rights of the women. Furthermore, partners renewed their commitments to:

- combat all forms of gender stereotyping
- ensure equal access to education and vocational training, including new information technologies
- promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women and men in the media
- promote women’s participation in dialogue between cultures and cultural exchanges.²¹

» **The European Neighbourhood Policy**

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was developed in 2004 with the objective of strengthening prosperity, stability and security of all. This ENP framework links 16 of EU’s closest neighbours. These include Algeria, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia. The EU-funded gender equality programme developed a practical guide on ‘Women and Media in the Euro-Mediterranean Region’ to improve the portrayal of women in the media in the region. The guide is available in English, French and Arabic, and reinforces the capacities of Media to promote a balanced and non-stereotyped image of women in the media of the Euro-Mediterranean region. It brings together regional Arab and Euro-Mediterranean references on gender equality.²²

EU RELATED LEGISLATION

The gender-mainstreaming obligation contained in the Lisbon Treaty entered into force on 1 December 2009 and should be fully implemented into all European policies and programmes related to the media and information society. The Audio-visual Media Services Directive prohibits discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, nationality, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation in commercial communications whether linear (broadcast) or non-linear (video-on demand).²³

21 http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/women/docs/2009_11_conference_en.pdf — Articles 1,4 and 24.Paragraph iii

22 http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=496&id_type=9&lang_id=450&subject=12

23 Opinion on «Breaking Gender stereotypes in the Media»: see http://ec.europa.eu/justice/genderequality/files/opinions_advisory_committee/2010_12_opinion_on_breaking_gender_stereotypes_in_the_media_en.pdf. Directive 2010/13/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 March 2010 on the coordination of provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual Media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive). See Text with EEA relevance: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:095:0001:0024:EN:PDF>

NATIONAL

There may also be national actions plan on gender equality – and/or on stereotyping in the media, that can be referred to.

SHORT OVERVIEW BY COUNTRY OF WOMEN IN REVOLUTIONS AND CHALLENGES THEY FACE IN TRANSITION

TUNISIA

Women in the Revolution

Pre-revolutionary Tunisia was perceived as brand-leader on women's rights in the region. Polygamy became illegal, women had equal divorce rights, abortion is legal and two-thirds of university students are women. There was a minimum quota of at least 25% women in Parliament.

Despite these legal rights, women suffered under the dictatorship from the same fear and oppression as men. From the start Tunisian women were active alongside men in the uprising that ended the rule of Zine Abidine Ben Ali. However women's prominence was given little media coverage.

In January 2011 an article in Muslimah Media Watch noted there was little media mention of the women who took part in the protests in Tunisia, nor of the victims of the security forces response, such as the woman who was shot and killed in Nabeul.²⁴

One Lebanese blogger contrasted Lebanon's Cedar Revolution in which the image of young progressive women became image symbols. He described how Tunisia's revolution paid little importance to circulating images of 'liberated' women.

In April 2011 the Tunisia National Council for the Protection of the Revolution, a body created to oversee the transition process, announced that 50% of candidates fielded by every Party must be women. Some 45 per cent of the 3.8 million Tunisians who registered to vote were women. Over half the 1.7 million women who signed up were between the ages of 21 and 30.²⁵

Tunisia in Transition - key challenges faced by women

The October 2011 elections did not meet the consequent high expectations for gender parity. The percentage of elected women dropped from 26.3% before the revolution to 22%. 49 women were elected to the Constitutional assembly of 217 seats.²⁶

Women now fear rights gained over the past five decades could be swept away by a tide of social conservatism which has triggered debate on topics that have long been taboo such as family status, polygamy and the argument that women should stay at home as a solution to unemployment. The Islamist party Ennahda won the elections with more than 41% of the votes. Lawyer Bushra Belhaj Hemeida is concerned about the discourse Ennahda has been using through its media outlets, like the Party's official paper al-Fajr, or the media in general. She says, «Part of this discourse is slandering modernists and liberals».²⁷

²⁴ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/mmw/2011/01/women-in-tunisia-revolution/>

²⁵ Article by Yasmine Ryan in Aljazeera , 11 August 2011: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/08/201181617052432756.html>, Follow Yasmine Ryan on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/yasmineryan>

²⁶ <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/08/201181617052432756.html>

²⁷ <http://saltspringnews.com/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=21884>

The coalition government led by Ennahda made promises not to impose strict Islamic rules on society; however ultra-conservative Salafists have been putting pressures on several universities around the country with their demands. One example is the Faculty of Letters, Arts and Humanities at the University of Manouba in the north of Tunis, where a group of Salafist students held a sit-in for over a month demanding the separation of men and women in classes, a prayer room and the right for women to wear the niqab.²⁸

Gender-based violence

Since the Islamist Ennahda party came to power after the revolution of 2011, many observers including women's rights groups have denounced police harassment of women.²⁹ In September 2012, a woman was raped in a car by two policemen in Tunis while a third policeman took her fiancé to extort money from him. When filing a complaint against the police officers, who got arrested and charged for rape and extortion, the woman and her fiancé were accused of indecent behaviour by the very same police officers.³⁰

The case sparked a public outcry, with Tunisian civil society groups, including NGOs and opposition figures condemning the actions of the police. The NGOs, including the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women and the Tunisian League of Human Rights, described the accusation of indecency as a procedure that «transforms the victim into the accused», and questioned «the seriousness of the government's commitment to applying the national plan to combat violence against women». Also condemning the actions of the police, a coalition of leftwing opposition parties called for a law to protect «Tunisian men and women against all forms of physical, moral and sexual violence».³¹ The Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki answered to the storm of protests with offering the woman a state apology.³²

28 <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/30911/World/Region/Tunisian-universities-face-pressure-from-salafists.aspx>; <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/31065/World/Region/Police-brake-up-Salafist-sitin-at-Tunisias-Manouba.aspx>

29 http://www.lemonde.fr/tunisie/article/2012/10/02/violee-par-des-policiers-une-tunisienne-risque-d-etre-jugee-pour-atteinte-a-la-pudeur_1768888_1466522.html

30 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/tunisia-woman-allegedly-raped-police-may-face-jail-time-2012-09-27>

31 <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentPrint/2/0/54859/World/0/President-Marzouki-apologises-to-Tunisian-woman-ra.aspx>

32 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-19846926>

EGYPT

Women in the Revolution

'We did everything. There was no difference between men and women. ALL of us were there, throwing stones, moving dead bodies'. Egyptian activist, Asmaa Mahfouz.³³

«As a woman in Tahrir, I truly felt like I was in a new country, a new Egypt. I marched amidst thousands of men and not once did I get harassed, or felt threatened in any way. Some women showed up alone, some with friends and some with their children and husbands. The men in Tahrir were polite and welcoming to all the women who showed up to protest. I spoke with many women who spent nights in Tahrir, on the ground or in tents, alongside unrelated men. Not one said that she felt threatened in any way. For many of these women, myself included, this total absence of sexual harassment was a surprise – indeed, a 2008 survey by the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights says that no less than 83% of Egyptian women have experienced sexual harassment. Our experience in Tahrir gave us hope that this sad state of affairs was changing». Anthropologist Yasmin Moll who made the film *The Women of Tahrir*.³⁴

An estimated 40% of the protesters in Tahrir Square were women. In addition to rabble-rousing, protesting, and acting as spokespersons, women organised food and blankets deliveries and medical help. A feature of the Egyptian Revolution was the gradual mobilisation of ordinary women who had no previous history of political involvement. They saw themselves as agents of change for a better future, a better Egypt. Women organised a million woman march to coincide with International Women's Day 2011. Among their key demands – women's input into the new Constitution and legislative changes for gender equality.³⁵

Egypt in Transition – key challenges faced by women

Gender-based violence

On March 9th 2011 protesters returned to Tahrir Square to restate their calls for freedom, justice and equality. The army arrested scores of demonstrators. Local activists reported that the women protesters in custody were beaten and forced by to undergo 'virginity checks'.³⁶ The

33 <http://www.economist.com/node/21532256>

34 <http://blog.goethe.de/transit/archives/27-What-Do-Pictures-Want-Imaging-Women-in-the-Egyptian-Revolution.html>

35 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/07/cairo-million-woman-march-called-for>

36 <http://www.economist.com/node/21532256?frsc=dg%7Ca>

women were threatened with prostitution charges if they were found not to be virgins.³⁷ In December 2011 photographs and video footage of security forces beating and stripping the woman in the blue bra shocked the world and became part of the iconography of the Transition.³⁸

The sexual violence against women reached horrific levels during the demonstrations celebrating the second anniversary of the beginning of the revolution in the vicinity of Tahrir square with cases of gang rape and mob harassment. While Egyptian civil society NGOs have recorded 23 cases of gang rapes on the 25th and 26 of January 2013,³⁹ cases of sexual violence have steadily been reported over the past two years, sign that these attacks on women are emerging into a pattern. The organized nature of these gang-rapes that seem to follow the same tactic of isolating women from the crowd, confusing people trying to rescue them by having certain people from the mob claim that they are protecting women, before pushing and shoving women into deserted streets to rape them,⁴⁰ are indicative of a conscious political and social strategy aiming at scaring and shaming women away from participating to the shaping of the new political system in Egypt.⁴¹

Accountability

One of the challenges is how to get accountability from those responsible for violations. Thousands of women marched in protest at the 'virginity testing' and the brutal beating and kicking of the 'blue bra' woman. However, women members of the Muslim Brotherhood, known as sisters, denounced the protest. They portrayed the women who marched as agents of foreign manipulation, a description often used by the military itself and the Brotherhood to disparage Egyptian women's dissent.

The legacy of impunity left by former dictator Hosni Mubarak and the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) is seemingly being implemented by the government of Mohammed Morsi; up to date, no proper investigations have been carried out and no perpetrators have been held accountable for their acts.⁴²

Constitution and Gender Equality Legislation

A major challenge is how to get women's rights, non-discrimination and gender equality on to the socio-political agenda from which they are absent. Former First Lady Suzanne Mubarak helped push through laws banning female genital mutilation and allowing women to become judges. These laws still stand, but are tainted by those demonising association of women's rights with the former regime. This is unfortunate, says Hoda Badran, head of the Alliance for Arab Women. *'They weren't Suzanne Mubarak's laws. She gave a little push towards the end, but we did the work.'*⁴³

37 <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/2011/11/02/women-continue-to-struggle-during-post-arab-spring-transitions/>

38 <http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/12/20/beatings-of-blue-bra-woman-reignites-egyptian-protests/>

39 <http://www.elaph.com/Web/news/2013/2/790260.html?entry=Egypt#sthash.WK4GkPvE.dpbs>

40 <http://www.elaph.com/Web/news/2013/2/790260.html?entry=Egypt#sthash.WK4GkPvE.dpbs>

41 <http://www.france24.com/en/20130203-cairo-gang-rape-video-women-rights-protest-egypt-politics-tahrir-square>

42 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/egypt-impunity-fuels-sexual-violence-2013-02-06>; <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/72066/Egypt/Politics-/Torture-and-impunity-continue-in-Egypt-Amnesty-.aspx>

43 <http://www.economist.com/node/21532256>

Egyptian women's groups have been vociferous with petitions and conferences about women's rights in the Constitution.

The Members of the Council deciding on the new Constitution were all men. The Arab media (possibly unwittingly) reinforced the all-male approach to the Constitution. For example Hesham Sallam's lengthy article titled 'Return of Identity Politics' looked at support for and against the Constitutional amendments. He mentioned religious-oriented groups and secular groups *but made no mention at all of women*.⁴⁴

The final draft of the new constitution, which was approved by the Constituent Assembly on 30 November 2012, makes Sharia the main source of legislation and ignores women's equal rights as citizens. The preamble of the constitution states that «equality and equal opportunities are established for all citizens, men and women, without discrimination or nepotism or preferential treatment, in both rights and duties». However, the guarantee of non-discrimination based on sex is not included in the constitution's actual provisions, thus the principle of equality between men and women included in the preamble loses its effect.⁴⁵ The only references made to women's rights in the draft constitution are within the framework of religion and family.⁴⁶

Elections

One of the first steps by Egyptian leaders after President Mubarak was toppled was the removal in May 2011 of a quota of seats reserved for female candidates first introduced in 1979.⁴⁷ In the Egyptian post-revolution election 376 women were candidates. This was a third of all candidates. However, the number of women in Parliament plummeted to 9 women out of 508 Members of Parliament compared to 68 women in the previous Parliament. Partly due to the fact that party leaders placed women candidate names very low on the candidates' lists where they had virtually no chance of getting elected.⁴⁸ After the first elections the Muslim Brotherhood and the ultraconservative Salafists control more than 70% of Parliamentary seats.

Women are seeking their own ways to participate in political life. 'Gigi', has taken up a video camera to record poverty and social injustices in her country. She says «Women want their rights respected on divorce, maternity issues and custody of children». Television presenter Bothaina Kamel ran for President. She says, «People have come up to me and asked, 'Is it even legal for a woman to run?' I hope to set a trend, to open a door. A girl sent me a Twitter: 'You have given us a chance to dream'». ⁴⁹

For the anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution a documentary on the BBC Newsnight programme gave comprehensive coverage of Egyptian women one year on. One item showed women in Alexandria setting up an alternative 'Women's Parliament' in response to the low numbers of women in Parliament. This attracted international media coverage.⁵⁰

44 <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1728/reflections-on-egypt-after-march-19>

45 <http://reliefweb.int/report/egypt/un-expert-group-encourages-review-egypt's-draft-constitution-concerning-equality-and>

46 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/egypt-s-new-constitution-limits-fundamental-freedoms-and-ignores-rights-women-2012-11-30>

47 <http://www.trust.org/trustlaw/news/egypts-women-flock-to-vote-but-risk-lacking-parliamentary-seats-campaigners/>

48 <http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/INF30.pdf>

49 <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/feb/14/world/la-fg-egypt-women-20120215>

50 BBC Newsnight. Presenter Sue Lloyd Roberts. 15 February 2012.

LIBYA

Women in the revolution

'Women took on the role of the state. They were feeding people, they were taking people to the hospitals, they were nurses, doctors, they were financiers, they sold their gold, they transported weapons, they made weapons at home, they financed the freedom fighters'. Shahrazad Kablan, a Benghazi-born teacher and activist, presenter of a show on Free Libya television.⁵¹

It was Libyan women who triggered the uprising against the dictator Muammar Gaddafi on 15 February 2011. Gaddafi's security forces opened fire on the mothers, sisters, wives and daughters demonstrating outside Abou Salem prison demanding the truth about 1200 detainees executed by Gaddafi in 1996.

During the struggle to oust Muammar Gaddafi, many Libyan women in the country housed revolutionaries, transported medicine and weapons, acted as logistical support to both NATO and revolutionary troops and acted as spokespersons to the media. Many in the diaspora raised funds, sent medicines, blogged, tweeted and lobbied. YouTube footage shows women protesters in Derna calling for Gaddafi to go.⁵² In Rana Jawad's programme on BBC World Service Radio *'Knitting in Tripoli'* about the Libyan resistance movement in the struggle against Gaddafi, one woman described how she regularly smuggled ammunition in her handbag to the resistance fighters.

Libya Transition- key challenges faced by women

«I tweet from the (One Voice) conference here in Libya, saying that the former interim leader Abdel-Jalil is admonished by the women for his comments on polygamy. One woman tells him she intends to be prime minister and she isn't asking permission. The frustration among Libyan women is palpable. They were key in the success of the revolution, and the newly formed government has not adequately represented them in political appointments nor included them in high-level delegations and meetings or other decision-making roles». Libyan-Irish Journalist Farah Abushwasha writing in the Irish Times.⁵³

Libya is in a state of rebirth for human rights and governance institutions. There have never been more than 2 women at one time on the Transition Government which was composed at various times of some 30–60 members. In the Transition Libyan women have mobilised, formed NGOs, arranged conferences, held meetings around the country and set up women's centres. They have lobbied Libyan and international officials and politicians. They mainly used radio and television to convey their messages, and to a limited extent also e-mail, web-sites, Facebook and skype-cons to coordinate advocacy efforts.⁵⁴

51 <http://www.tripolipost.com/articledetail.asp?c=1&i=7425>

52 http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=URoAm8NT6Ts

53 One Voice, women's conference, November 2011.

54 Internet usage is 5.5% among the Libyan population and less than 2% among women.

They want women's participation in setting the new election laws, the new Constitution, policies and changes needed at basic levels such as addressing violence and the psychological effects on women caused by the loss of family members.

Constitution and Gender Equality Legislation

To date, the Libyan General National Congress has not yet elected a committee to draft a new constitution due to divisions over modality for its selection; some want the National Congress to appoint the constitutional committee while others rather see the committee formed through elections.⁵⁵

Aiming to develop women's and youth strategies for influencing the Libyan constitutional drafting process, Karama and the Libyan Women's Platform convened a session on 30 August–1 September 2012 in Tripoli gathering 37 Libyan activists and two members of the General National Congress. The participants agreed on recommendations addressed to the Libyan General National Congress in relation to preserving the independence of the constitutional drafting committee, underlining the need to ensure the input of legal experts and civil society, as well as to ensure that women comprise at least 30% of the committee.⁵⁶

Elections

Following the fall of Ghaddafi, the Libyan National Transitional Council (NTC) created an Electoral Law Committee, made up of members of the NTC, in an effort to set the foundation for the first democratic elections in Libya in over 40 years.

As there had never been elections previously, the Libyan people had no prior experience with e.g. affirmative action for women and minorities. On January 1st 2012, the first draft of the Electoral Law was released, and it stated a 10% quota for women. This was met by protests and strong lobbying from The Voice of Libyan Women and other NGOs.

As the Law also disallowed dual citizens to run, it was seen as generally unfair and heavily protested against by numerous other individuals and NGOs. This led to a second draft being released which removed the quota altogether as the majority of Libyan people did not support it». This statement is true for the sole reason that most do not understand what the quota is, and the term was used negatively in the media.

It was after numerous petitions, protests and the creation of an alternative committee that the «Zipper List» system, inspired in part from Tunisia, was adopted. This «Zipper» system allowed for women to be placed both horizontally and vertically in the 80 (out of 200) seats allotted to political parties. Note that the Zipper List did NOT apply to the 120 individual seats (of which only one was won by a woman).

55 <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=56320>

56 <http://libyanwomensplatformforpeace.wordpress.com/2013/02/08/libyan-activists-issue-recommendations-on-the-constitutional-drafting-process/>

There were a total of 634 women candidates in the elections, and political parties were represented by women in 44% of their possible seats and 32 women were elected to parliament through their political party. Individual candidates were only 3% women, a total of 89 candidates, of which only one seat in the town of Bani Walid was won.

33 women were elected, a very encouraging 17% of the parliament. More encouraging than this is the fact that out of 2.8 million voters, 1.3 million were women, and in the southern town of Obari 51% of voters were women. This increased voter registration among women is another important point, as it is one of the reasons that individual men candidates, as well as political parties, put more of an emphasis on women's issues in an effort to gain the women vote. Not only that but women were strongly encouraged to vote—women only polling stations were created to allow conservative women to vote more comfortably and women were strongly represented in polling staff, monitoring teams, and the media.

Gender-based violence

Libyan charities reported that in the west of the country, particularly in the cities of Zawia and Misrata as well as the Eastern city of Ajdabiya, Muammar Gaddafi's forces raped women and girls in front of their fathers and brothers. It has been difficult to confirm the number of cases of sexual violence during the conflict, and Libyan physicians suggest that most cases go unreported due to the stigma attached to rape in the country.⁵⁷

In a report presented to the U.N. Security Council in November 2011, former International Criminal Court Chief Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo stated that «while it is premature to draw conclusions on specific numbers, the information and evidence indicates at this stage that hundreds of rapes occurred during the conflict».⁵⁸

Despite speculation by Libyan aid workers that women survivors of rape risked being murdered by their own families in so-called «honour killings» there is no factual data to support these claims. There is however a strong social stigma towards rape survivors, which has an impact not only on them but also their families and communities.⁵⁹ The charity World for Libya engaged imams across the border in Tunisia to preach that rape is not the victim's fault and other organizations and activists worked towards removing the social stigma attached to rape victims through protests, fundraising, and awareness raising.

On 13 February 2013, «The Voice of Libyan Women» encouraged Libyans to participate in the International Purple Hijab Day against Domestic Violence, an event which brings Muslim men and women all over the world together against domestic abuse.⁶⁰ Women in Ajdabiya commemorated

57 <http://www.womenundersiegeproject.org/conflicts/profile/libya>

58 <http://www.icc-cpi.int/NR/rdonlyres/3FD60A16-9BE7-4BD3-A12D-65D93E96B455/283927/StatementICCProsecutorLibyaReporttoUNSC021113.pdf>

59 Mentioned by The Voice of Libyan Women founder Alaa Murabit.

60 http://www.thelibraryinitiative.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=98:how-to-mark-international-purple-hijab-day-against-domestic-violence&catid=1:news-from-libya&Itemid=25

this day through organising several lectures in secondary schools for girls aimed at informing about this day and raising awareness on women's status in society.⁶¹

Accountability

In November 2012, the former Libyan Prime Minister Al Baghdadi al-Mahmoudi went on trial charged with corruption and ordering mass rape during the revolution of 2011.⁶² This is the second time in history cases of rape and gender violence in conflict are being tried in a domestic court.⁶³

The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court Fatou Bensouda underlined in a statement in November 2012 that they «continue to collect information on allegations of rapes and sexual violence, which targeted both men and women». At the same occasion, she also called upon the new Libyan government «to ensure that there is no amnesty for international crimes and no impunity for crimes, regardless of who the perpetrators is and who is the victim».⁶⁴

A reporting system has been set up by the National Transitional Council through the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs with the aim to give rape victims the opportunity to come forward. However, factors such as the social stigma attached to sexual violence and threats of physical punishment may hinder women to report crimes committed against them.⁶⁵

61 <https://www.facebook.com/TheVoiceOfLibyanWomen>

62 <http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCABRE8AB0KQ20121112?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0>

63 http://www.stoprapeinconflict.org/ending_impunity_in_libya

64 <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=43435#>

65 <http://www.womenundersiegeproject.org/conflicts/profile/libya>

Women in the revolution

'Women benefited from their social standing in an oriental society like Syria, which allowed them to play an important role during the first months of the revolution, as the security forces had to think twice before assaulting them. This situation triggered the impulse of women to form a human shield during demonstrations to prevent security forces, as much as possible, from reaching and capturing young men. Nevertheless, this did not prevent women from being arrested on many occasions.' Syrian young woman activist, Nour.⁶⁶

The contribution of Syrian women to the revolution was not in the form of a substitute or a standby for men. From the onset of the revolution, women sought to impose their existence parallel to that of men: they shouted and screamed with demonstrators and ululated while escorting the martyrs to their final resting place and they assisted in the writings on the walls during demonstrations, as well as in cutting off roads in the face of security forces and the militias loyal to the regime. Syrian women from the many and different vocations, social classes and geographic distribution participated in the revolutionary movements: village women practiced activities that differed from those of city women⁶⁷ and housewives stood side by side with women activists, university students, doctors, lawyers, politicians and many others without discriminating between veiled and uncovered women. They worked together to provide assistance to the ill-fated among the Syrian population, offered relief services, cure and medication to the injured, conveyed news about the maneuvers of the army and security forces, and prepared food and delivered it to the wretched and needy.

Syrian women also contributed markedly to the campaigns that promoted national peace and insisted on continuation and activation of civic movements, most notably the campaigns launched by Rima Dali carrying the slogan: «*Stop the killing. We want to build a homeland for all Syrians*». Syrian women and girls also had their own demands during the demonstrations. Among the different signs that were written reflecting women's eagerness for freedom, one was lifted by a young girl stating that «*when I grow up, I want to be the first woman president of the Arab Republic of Syria*». Another banner stated that «*The feminine taa'⁶⁸ in Syria is no longer bound, the taa' is free..free..free*». As expected, this vast and diverse participation of Syrian women to change the regime and call for freedom, justice and dignity, along with the continuation and persistence of the demonstrations, and the deep rooting of the revolution with each passing day, exposed women to various forms of arrests, abduction⁶⁹ torture,

⁶⁶ The full name of some activists quoted in this text is not put upon their request.

⁶⁷ Village women were distributing flyers and reported about the events to the coordination bodies in secrecy, while city women were participating in the demonstrations and public gatherings since the beginning of the revolution.

⁶⁸ The feminine taa' is a letter in the Arabic language which makes a word feminine.

⁶⁹ According to the Center for Documentation of Violations in Syria, the number of women and girls detained in the prisons of the Syrian regime reached 400, while the number of those killed reached 2098. However, there were no available statistics for the number of those abducted.

rape⁷⁰ and killing.

Media played a role in revealing the Syrian women's role in the revolution throughout revealing their activities and the challenges that they face. Television channels, including «Al Arabiya», «MBC» and «Al Jazeera» presented reports of different actions taken by Syrian women activists opposing the regime.⁷¹ Women also benefited from the free space provided to them by the internet, especially Facebook and blogs that arose during the revolution, to demonstrate the violations that they have been subjected to.⁷²

Syrian women refugees outside Syria

The violations that were committed against women's rights did not end here, but haunted women to the camps where they took refuge. There, the news broke out about marrying off minor girls to adult men over 40 years old. Campaigns were launched to resist this phenomenon under the slogan «*Refugees Not Captives*». In addition, several press articles were issued in opposition of the phenomenon but did not receive sufficient televised media coverage because the news about the armed conflict in Syria continued to be the most important piece of news for the media. One photo was released portraying two little girls carrying a sign that stated «*we do not wish to become the children of a man who degrades our mother claiming that he had rescued her from the refugee camps*».⁷³

Syria preparing for the Transition phase – key challenges faced by women

The Syrian National Council, which was established in August 2011, was one of the most important bodies that appeared earlier on the Syrian scene as an alternative for the current regime. However, this Council was a disappointment vis-à-vis the representation of women, whereby the number of women members during the initial stages was three among a total of 36 members, and later on, this number increased to a maximum of 24 women members among a total of 200 members,⁷⁴ despite the fact that the Council stated during the first meeting of its General Assembly in Tunisia to raise the percentage of women participation (within its bodies, committees and offices) to 30%, but the decision remained at that point to be but ink on paper. Woman activist Marah Al-Biqai stated that «*Former president of the Syrian National Council, Dr. Burhan Ghalyun, was*

70 Rape was one of the most heinous violations committed against revolutionary women in Syria. Some women provided their testimonies about the rape episodes that were committed against them by the army of the regime. Many were killed either by their rapist or by the parents (due to the alleged shame inflicted on the family) .Until 5 March 2013, there was no estimate of the total number of women victims of rape in Syria. However, the Women Under Siege website published a map documenting sexual assaults against women in Syria: <https://womenundersiegeyria.crowdmap.com/>, and according to which, there were 136 such cases.

71 «Al Arabiya» television presented a complete report on women in Daraya revolting and demanding the detainees: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2TOiBTMuUFA>; MBC, showed another report shedding light on the role that the women of Damascus played behind the scenes in organizing (anti-regime demonstrations), enriching them with various ideas and messages: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjAzUeyILB0>; A report by «Al Jazeera» television displayed a group of women from «Hama» city covering their faces with masks fearing that the regime would identify them, while carrying out their work by communicating via facebook to send invitations to demonstrate in the Syrian Squares: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhrG78VBixY&feature=related>

72 Several women gave testimonies of how they were raped via youtube, most of them covering their faces except for the eyes in fear of being exposed. The channel Al Jazeera made a reportage about a woman who took refuge in Jordan: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JpTXRqqZ98>

73 <http://arabic.cnn.com/2012/hiaw/9/27/Syrian.women.refugee/>

74 <http://www.dw.de/المرأة-السورية-دور-فعال-خلال-الثورة-ومستقبل-غامض-في-سوريا-الغد/a-16278736-1>

*not interested in granting struggling Syrian women the right to play an important role in leading the Syrian opposition».*⁷⁵

Syrian activist Ru'a Taweel states: «*We fear the suppression of Syrian women's rights afterwards, should there be no new steps taken to recognize women as a major player in the Syrian revolution and a major participant in the process of building a free democratic nation that would ensure their right of freedom from social and political oppression that has been practiced against them ad infinitum. We need to adopt serious steps in order to retune the gender balance within Syrian society in order to ensure a better future for men and women equally*».⁷⁶ The concerns of women activists are legitimate taking into consideration that the issue of women's rights was one of the major controversial topics in the course of the establishment of a new constitution, during the last discussion of the «The Day After Project»,⁷⁷ held during the period January to June 2012.

These concerns of Syrian women of being marginalized in the transition phase are being addressed in social media, including in one article entitled «*Don't dream of democracy without women... Don't dream of freedom without women*»⁷⁸, written by Yahya Al-aous on Al Thara website.

All founding statements that have been published by alternative political bodies that were to take over the transition phase⁷⁹ neither contained future plans for women's rights concerning the increase of their representation and the nondiscrimination committed against them, nor ensured equality between men and women in all life domains.

The Syrian National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces was formed on 11 November 2012 in Doha, taking over the leadership role of the Syrian opposition factions.⁸⁰ Regrettably, the representation of women in the new Coalition falls short with only 3 women out of the 60 leading members, ignoring their active participation in the fight against Bashar al-Assad's regime since the onset of the conflict.⁸¹

The role of women are not mentioned in the leadership framework of the National Coalition entitled «The Syrian National initiative» (SNI) published on 1 November 2012.⁸² Women's rights concerns were, however, taken into consideration in the Cairo conference documents agreed upon in July 2012 which outlines the joint political vision for the Syrian opposition regarding challenges of the transitional period, as well as the constitutional basis for the future of Syria. For example, it is underlined that a new constitution of the country will enshrine that «The Syrian

75 <http://wonews.net/ar/index.php?act=post&id=1307>

76 Interview by independent Syrian journalist and women's rights activist Rula Asad.

77 <http://www.usip.org/the-day-after-project>

78 In his article, Yahya points out that there is a new growing Syrian feminist movement with an Islamic character which currently neglects the demands of rights of women in favor of freedom. Traditional feminist movements recognize this gap and deliver messages to various parties, including the Islamic one, of women's determination to play a role in the future of the country. <http://www.thara-sy.com/TharaEnglish>

79 Such as the Kurdish National Council and the Democratic Forum.

80 The coalition is led by president Moaz al-Khatib, former imam of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, with the assistance of two vice-presidents; Suhair al-Atassi, a secular human rights activist and co-founder and former member of the Syrian Revolution General Commission and Riad Seif, former business man and veteran political dissident; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15798218>; <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=48619>; <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=50018>

81 <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/139038/fotini-christia/how-syrian-women-are-fueling-the-resistance>

82 <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=49872>

people are one people, whose texture was established through history on the full equality of citizenship regardless of their origin, color, sex, language ethnicity, political opinion, religion, or sect, on the basis of a comprehensive national concurrence» and that «women are equal with men, and it is not permissible to go back on the gains of any of their rights».⁸³

Gender-based violence

The war and instability have caused an increase in violations against women within the family, both in Syria and in the refugee camps outside the country. The important work of documenting these violations has been sidelined for relief work.

According to the first findings of «Women under Siege» of sexual violence in Syria,⁸⁴ potentially thousands of women have experienced rape, sexual torture, and often death since the onset of the conflict in March 2011. In 42 percent of the incidents, the victims were allegedly attacked by multiple perpetrators. Their findings also show that 20 % of the reported victims are men; attacks which mainly occur within detention facilities. A majority of the attacks, on men and women, have been carried out by government perpetrators and militiamen (shabiha).⁸⁵ According to victims and human rights groups, rape is being used by the government as a weapon of war to scare the opposition.⁸⁶

In the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) report «Syria: A Regional Crisis» published in January 2013, it is underlined that sexual violence is identified by many Syrian women and men refugees as a primary reason to why they sought refuge in Lebanon and Jordan. Yet once in the refugee camps, they are not able to receive the treatment they need due to lack of medical and counselling services.⁸⁷ Women and children living in refugee camps are many times beaten and assaulted due to psychological stress. Young girls in refugee camps are deprived of their education; they do not go to the school set up in the camps due to the fear of being sexually harassed or raped. At the same time, there is an increase of reports of early and/or forced marriages of women and girls.⁸⁸

For more information on gender-based violence faced by Syrian women, kindly see the Written Intervention «Grave and ongoing violations of women's rights in the context of the conflict in Syria»,⁸⁹ submitted to the Human Rights Council by Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) and Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) on 10 May 2013.

83 <http://othersuns.wordpress.com/2012/07/06/syria-the-final-statement-for-the-syrian-opposition-conference/>

84 Women under Siege base their findings on 117 reports on sexual violence collected between March 2011-July 2012.

85 <http://www.womenundersiegeproject.org/blog/entry/the-ultimate-assault-charting-syrias-use-of-rape-to-terrorize-its-people>

86 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9296135/Syria-using-rape-as-weapon-against-opposition-women-and-men.html>

87 <http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/IRCReportMidEast20130114.pdf>

88 <http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/IRCReportMidEast20130114.pdf>

89 http://www.euomedrights.org/fra/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/NGO_WI_Womens-rights-Syria_HRC23_FR.pdf

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