

FEMINISTS Against Violence



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Introduction:

Feminism has always been present in our collective consciousness as women living in the Arab world. We may have not fully grasped the concept or understood the term, but we sensed it every time we asked ourselves: "Why is our reality like this as Arab women?". We found the answer, and we had more questions. We made them into demands, and persisted on them generation after generation. Some feminists took it upon themselves to carry out the change, and as a result faced ostracization, hatred, and violence. We dreamed of a better future for us, our daughters, and all women who will one day reap what we sow. We have learned over time and experience that our ally in resisting the patriarchy and other systems that assisted it in oppressing us, are women. We refused to be silenced or oppressed and our solidarity was beyond borders. Behind us, we left the stigmatization and hate speech directed at us because we are women first and foremost, and feminists second. In this year's 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, we bring to you a collection of women's experiences from across the region. We discussed with them their activism, about feminism, about their personal lives, and about their ambitions and visions as feminists. Then, we produced brief overviews of their life stories. We were able to produce this content in Arabic, born from our native Arab contexts. The knowledge we brought to you was born out of their individual struggles, but to ironically point out that our burdens and goals are shared beyond geography and borders. We are proud of them and their feminist journeys in an misogynistic environment that criminalizes being a woman. Together, we are here to exist loudly and expand into new horizons of change for women and other marginalized identities. Marginalized identities are included in feminism not as mere allies, rather, as partners in the struggle. Today, we resist and stand unified with regional feminist movements. Tomorrow, we will sow the seeds of our resistance in an environment that does not hate us, does not abuse us, and most importantly, does not kill us.

Enas Tleli

Tunisia

My name is Enas from Tunisia. I am a woman. Arabic is my mother tongue, African in heritage, and a feminist in vision, coming from a middle-class background. I am passionate about intersectionality and fight alongside women and the LGBTQ community in the face of patriarchy, authoritarianism, and the narratives taking advantage of our plight to self-promote.

Feminism in Tunisia sets an example for the rest of the Arab world. However, like any other Arab country, Tunisia has its challenges that we as feminists try to address. For instance, the implementation of the law to eliminate violence against women faces many barriers, like domestic violence cases that were the highest during the pandemic. Not to mention the gender and class-based violence that worker and farmer women face, such as the right to an inheritance, which we are currently fighting for. We are fighting for these rights under a president that considers them as personal issues. Instead, he promotes backward thinking and discrimination. To top it off, the political sphere separates feminism and politics, effectively marginalizing women's issues despite women being part of organizations playing impactful roles in political activism.



Currently, feminism in Tunisia is more radical than its predecessors. Young women are able to cultivate spaces for discussion of women's issues, political issues, and classism. But, this makes the challenges more significant. On a state level, the setbacks are in the national narratives, implementation of laws, and laws violating the bodily autonomy of LGBTQ members. On a societal level, stereotypes about women and gender-based roles are rampant, and backward ideologies like dress-code policing or cyber-targeting of activists are spreading. Surprisingly, that is precisely what drives us to continue. We are in a battle with institutions and structures that crush anyone daring to deviate. In response to this, though, our feminist movement stands in the face of patriarchy and classism. Our movement goes beyond sexual orientation and gender identities and is against security-based solutions and extremism. It is a movement that believes in unity, builds on the past, and aspires to open more doors for the future.

Feminism is a fight for existence

Amaal Al Malki

Qatar

My name is Amaal Al Malki, a Qatari feminist and academic, and I call for social justice and equality from a citizenry lens. I seek alternatives for our patriarchal social ways, ones that afford a decent life for all, especially women. The Qatari feminist movement recently witnessed a significant change, and I credit that to the younger generation well-versed in their rights. This younger generation skillfully used technology to its advantage; very promising. Feminist narratives became more widely seen and accepted. Yet, the Qatari feminist movement is not a monolith. There are many intersectionalities within. Whenever feminist narratives become abundant, counter-narratives deepen the divide between [women's issues] and society. Some want to differentiate between the secularism plight and the feminist plight. However, I see them as interconnected and interdependent. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 was a wake-up call for feminist issues. The pandemic revealed the deeply seated forms of domestic abuse against women, such as being pushed to choose between unpaid housework and salaried jobs outside the home.



**Let's unite our voice
in the feminist
movement**

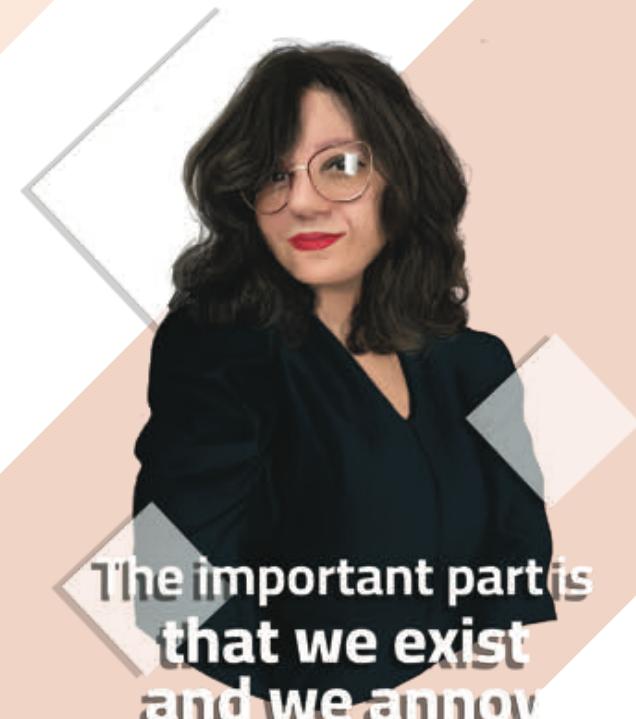
The pandemic also taught us that we need to center women with disabilities in our feminist activism. To do this, we need to shift the responsibility to protect women from the family to the state. Women are citizens and are owed rights according to the Qatari constitution, such as article 34. We need to criminalize domestic violence, protect working women, and amend family law. Qatari mothers need the ability to give their citizenship to their children. Such rights are unalienable, necessary, and are not limited to Qatar. We have learned a lot from other Arab women, especially political empowerment and the push to reform personal law. Such learning across the Arab world created regional solidarity beyond borders. I believe that the feminist movement in the Arab world is the same, despite different economic and political realities. That is why pitfalls and strides are shared among the Arab countries. Let us stand united and say no to violence against women.

Let's unite our voice in the feminist movement

Eman Amara

Algeria

I'm an Algerian feminist activist and writer. Algeria witnessed a unique feminist popular movement during the 22nd of February revolution, after centuries of oppressing women and dismissing their issues based on emergency laws in place after the Algerian civil wars that criminalized the right to protest. When feminists paved their way during the revolution, they faced violence and battering in public. As if they are only permitted to assimilate to the dominant revolution demands, omitting feminist demands. The options were bleak. Either become carbon copies of the 80s feminists and yield to mainstream demands, their plights become sub-demands, and their activism becomes limited to charity and development work. Or, they continue their feminist struggle anonymously to save being targeted. We chose the latter. The Algerian feminist struggle relied on the internet where political-legal feminist narratives included the LGBTQ community. The most significant achievement [from that era] is highlighting violence against women and popularizing the term "femicide" and documenting abuse cases. It was a long and hurdled path.



**The important part is
that we exist
and we annoy**

[Current] legislation allows child marriage, and has some comical laws like punishing the wife for using birth control without the husband's consent. Other practices happen beyond law, such as dropping abuse complaints and charges due to pressuring and threatening the victims, mandatory virginity tests requirement at police stations, and the centralization and elitism of protection tools. However, we face formidable challenges, the most important of which is finding a common language for the feminist narrative that relies on feminist knowledge and is not timid in its demands for reform and rights. I take advantage of being outside [Algeria] and be vocal in my support for women's rights. Solidarity, in my opinion, is built by centering and legitimizing survivors' role in the feminist struggle. Solidarity also relies on our ability as feminists to allow ourselves to take breaks from the work and heal. It is also the realization that even non-feminists deserve solidarity. If our existence, solidarity, and feminist struggle annoys some, we will not hesitate to continue annoying them.

The important part is that we exist and we annoy

Sahar Bin Ali

Kuwait

My name is Sahar Bin Ali, a writer, activist, and director. As a feminist activist in Kuwait, I see an increase in domestic violence on one hand, and increased demands by feminists to activate laws tackling domestic violence on the other. In recent years, the Kuwaiti feminist movement primarily focused on the demand above every time a domestic violence case ends with the woman killed. The movement also focused on demanding legislative texts to criminalize sexual harassment and criticism of the security institution for failing to protect women and dismiss their cases. On top of that, the [feminist movement's] long-standing demand is to pass the Kuwaiti citizenship of the mother to her children. Most of the feminist demands are directed towards the state, because we wanted to abolish numerous laws, such as Article 183 in Kuwaiti Punishment law which dictates women marry their rapists. Article 153 as well, colloquially called the honor law, or even pushing the marriage age higher. Aside from the state that adopted and legitimized them, what other institution has the power to reform misogynistic laws?



**Feminist struggle is
revolutionary,
and revolutionaries
do not despair**

? Even congress members who represent the people, which women are part of, did not significantly fight for women's issues. The Kuwaiti feminist movement faces multiple challenges. Like other Arab nations, the most significant challenge is the state, media, and the larger society's lack of acceptance of women's voices and awareness of their rights. In fact, the media purposefully makes women's demands comical in the public eye. As Kuwaiti feminists, we are acutely aware that our drive comes from humanity and justice. We are aware that change will not come overnight. This is the constant battle. Everyone will fight us? Let them. Rights that are established by force will not regress easily.

Feminist struggle is revolutionary, and revolutionaries do not despair

Hanadi Salah

Palestine

My name is Hanadi Salah, a Palestinian lawyer and women's rights defender. The nature of my work makes me acutely aware of women's struggles in the Gaza strip. I see the direct impact of laws on the lives of Palestinian women. We constantly are demanding the adoption, activation, or reform of a law, or work to improve the conditions of women by demanding the establishment of safe houses. I also believe that the political split [from the West Bank] and the absence of a Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) impacts women negatively. In my line of work, I see a lot of organizing done by feminist organizations, not necessarily only for women but for a better reality for everyone in Gaza. Feminist organizing is a little different than feminist popular movements, as in the former is more institutionalized. Feminist organizing played a crucial role in legislative reform, particularly on the decree prohibiting travel without legal guardians' consent. This decree constituted a violation of the freedom of mobility. The political split's impacts on women can be seen in the national battered women referral program's headquarters in Ramallah, which is inactive in Gaza.



Women are not imagined anything aside from a gender stereotype

Further, due to the dismissal of the PLC, no new law on the protection from domestic violence has been adopted, despite the significant increase in cases. To add insult to injury, there is strong opposition from the conservative majority in political parties and individuals who cannot imagine women beyond their gender stereotypical roles. They believe that pushing the custody age, adopting domestic violence laws, or establishing safe houses for children and women will promote uncontrollable women. Even me, as a lawyer, face gender stereotypes in the hallways of courthouses. Such attitudes are reflected in the legislative system, as cases on women issues face delays and lawyers' reliance on loopholes in divorce, custody, and alimony cases. This is what drives me to continue supporting women. Change will not occur unless the gap between the state and the multidimensional feminist movement is closed, promoting the protection of women from abuse in Palestine.

Women are not imagined anything aside from a gender stereotype

Hind Al-Shraideh

Palestine

Hind Al-Shraideh, Palestinian writer, journalist, and mother to three children. In Palestine, women suffer from a violence complex. On one hand, the occupation detains and kills us, and on the other, the Palestinian Authorities (PA) oppresses women and violates their privacy. All this to deter others from participating in public spaces.

Yet, women did not abandon the frontlines despite the threats, security targeting, arrests, and detention. Instead, they built solidarity, unified their demands and vision, and continued to take their place on the front lines of protests. They protest as mature Palestinian women, partners to men and children in society, unafraid of arrest or phone confiscations or threats by security forces. The demand has always been clear, all-encompassing freedom. Though we are under occupation, it is peculiar that we get arrested for calling for freedom. I am not the only one who got pepper-sprayed, beaten, hair pulled, and dragged in the street to be finally arrested by women officers trying to make an example of me. All while my children were crying in the night streets. I was confused by their cruelty, and felt pity towards them.



The [patriarchal] institution violates women police officers' rights under military service law, preventing them from earning equal pay with women, retirement rights, and path to promotion. The institution takes advantage of their economic needs, and commodifies them as tools to oppress other women deemed "indecent" like myself. I was also called indecent by women PA sympathizers. It took me some time to process being arrested, but what consoled me were the supportive messages from Palestinian and Arab women activists. Despite the oppression and calculated delays in progressing laws protecting women, we have a strong feminism movement in Palestine that knows its worth and capable of keeping the patriarchy and militarism up at night. Palestine is abundant with women carrying on the legacy of ones before who faced the occupation, cared for children after the Nakba and Naksa and intifada. Those women are Hind Al-Hussny, Samiha Khalil, Zlekha Shihaby, Aysheh Oudeh, and Laila Khalid. Personally, I invest in my children and raise them on principles of pluralism and respect. My message to every feminist mother; be a role model. Take your children to the forefronts so they can see women's resistance. Read to them about justice, equality, to tolerate difference, and to reject discrimination.

The feminist movement in Palestine keeps the patriarchy and militarism up at night.

We'am Shouqi

Sudan

We'am Shouqi, a Sudanese feminist. I work with numerous feminist organizations and groups. Today, I want to share with you what the post-revolution feminist movement looked like. Before the revolution, the term "feminism" was not popular or understood. Women's issues were discussed discreetly and demonized. After the revolution, feminist groups began popularizing the term, demanding that women's issues be on the transitional period's agenda. Young women, particularly outside the capital, used the internet to discuss and debate women's issues. On there, they openly discussed consent, domestic violence, marital rape, dress codes, and sexual violence. This attitude opened the window of opportunity to discuss sexual health and fertility. We hoped we would revolt against the regime and the patriarchy simultaneously. However, like in all other Arab nations, we were marginalized after the revolution. Our issues were considered not a priority to decision-makers and politicians alike. But this was not the only challenge. Civilian men also attacked feminists and the fruits of the feminist movement's labor.



**Rest assured,
you are not alone.
We are all with you**

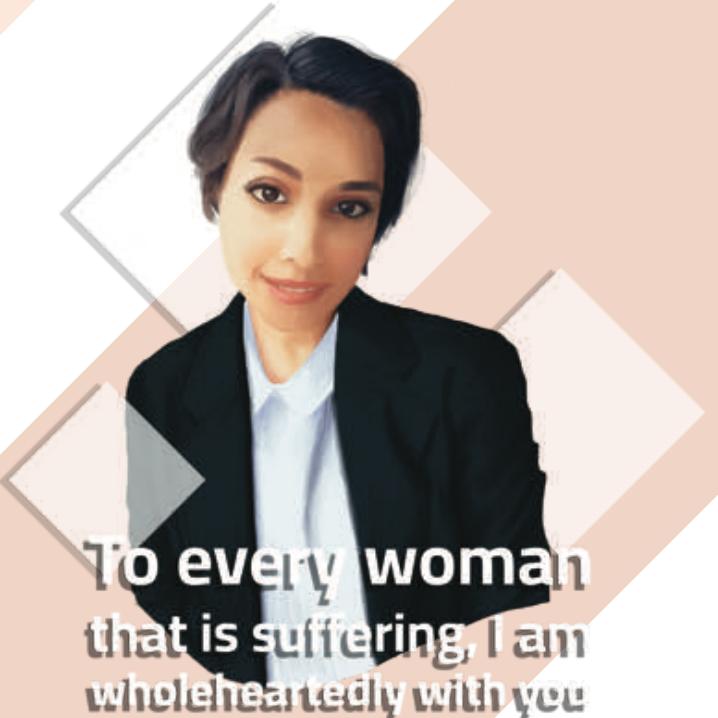
Like, after the public law limiting mobility freedom of women was revoked, men established groups that promote violence against women and monitor them in public. In this context where anti-feminism and misogynistic laws go hand in hand, we are oppressed and our feminist activism is criminalized. In this context, one has no option but to be a feminist, and join the young women in Sudan who continue to be vocal against patriarchy and political marginalization. As you join them, you can join the countless other Arab feminists who support your demands because they share your experiences, or about to. Even when our solidarity is limited by our positionality and privileges, we are all here for each other. All so that no woman feels alone in her feminist struggle. Our victory is one, and our burden is one.

**Rest assured, you are not alone.
We are all with you.**

Nour Al-Inzy

Iraq

Nour Al'Inzy, a poet and Iraqi activist. I'm a feminist because I believe that every woman has the right to decide her fate, and that defending this right is not easy. In the Iraqi context, with all its social and security dynamics, which hinders the presence of a foundational feminist movement to alleviate womens' concerns, especially women from minorities, rural areas, and black women in south Iraq. On that, there is a new feminist narrative in the making. You can sense this shift in a few avenues, such as Iraqi feminists' campaign to protect Article 57 of the Personal Law on custody. There are other examples like the Yazidi solidarity campaign, especially the Yazidi women after ISIS kidnapped around 3,000 Yazidi women. Lest we not forget too, the campaigns [Iraqi] feminists led against "honor killings", highlighting the media silence, the erasure of victims' names, and the legal impunity of the killers. Such campaigns evoke violent responses, such as bullying, name-calling, slander, and death threats. This makes feminist activism in Iraq dangerous within itself.



To every woman
that is suffering, I am
wholeheartedly with you

Imagine if there were an organized feminist movement in Iraq, with strategy, demands, and a prominent narrative inclusive of marginalized women within political, civic, and security spaces. We would be able to tackle pressing issues like custody, honor killings, child marriage, and domestic violence. I would imagine too that such a movement would demand having women shelters where their cases can be taken seriously. If only we can build national and regional unity. I am aware that solidarity is hard to achieve at this stage, but I see a promising Iraqi feminist movement.

**To every woman that is suffering,
I am wholeheartedly with you.**

Suha Oudeh

Iraq

Suha Oudeh, Iraqi journalist, Sawt Al-Nisa' organization director, with a passion in women's issues especially peace and conflict, and challenging the stereotypical image for women in the media. What I witness in Iraq is not a feminist movement, at least not literally. The feminist movement started in the early 20th century, but was limited to civil society organizations or women's party presence. Now, however, there are young women with a deeper awareness appearing in the political arena after 2019 and their participation in the October uprising against the regime and oppression. After that, they were able to develop clearer feminist demands such as opposing the reform of article 57 of the personal law after a ferocious battle to withdraw custody privileges from the mother led by politicians and Islamists. The [young feminists] used new techniques like the internet, and led advocacy campaigns to adopt laws criminalizing domestic violence. The law was scheduled to be adopted in 2015, but was fought at every turn and never made it to the parliament.



We need to
believe each other
and survivors

There is tension between feminists and non-feminists and liberals on one hand, and political Islam parties on the other. Such [fights] are to protect the Iraqi women in public spaces like streets, and private spaces like the home. Most abuse cases are solved by community police and never make it to legislation, leaving abused women to return to their abusers due to the lack of domestic violence shelters. This reflects the way legislation views Iraqi women only as part of a family and under the custody of the man. The law prohibits women from obtaining residential cards for this exact reason. And yet, women's presence in parliament and political roles in parties or government does not lead to highlighting women's issues. There is constant silencing, marginalizing, and media exclusion. There is still bullying and targeting of feminists, and active vilification of feminist ideology. At the end of the day, what drives you is your desire to live, and the responsibilities towards yourself and those around you that see you as a role model. For this to happen, we need to continue connecting and building solidarity among each other inside and outside Iraq. We need to believe each other, and the survivors/ victims, and provide a safe environment to everyone.

**We need to believe each other and
survivors/ victims.**

Hala Bouq'eqes

Libya

Hala Bouq'eqes, Libyan, and the director and founding member of Jusoor center for studies and development. I began my feminist journey following the horrid assassinations of Libyan feminists in 2014. I see my journey as a continuation of their journey. The feminist movement in Libya is closely tied to the security, economic, and social climate. This has facilitated the movement's disintegration and division, and consequently, work on women issues took a back seat, and gender based violence cases including cyber-violence, which I personally face too. There is more women representation during the peace negotiations, but feminist demands remain the same; activating the quota system in regards to political participation, putting a stop to violence, allowing the passing of citizenship to the children of Libyan mothers. I believe it is critical to advocate for national agendas and public laws to be gender-sensitive. I also believe it is crucial that violence against women is transformed from a "taboo" to a topic discussed openly because violence not only impacts the victim but also society as a whole.



It is crucial that violence against women is transformed from a "taboo" to a topic discussed openly

We need to take a [women] safety-centered approach to security institutions, hospitals, the legislative system as a whole, and the implementation of laws. We also need transparent and frequent statistics on women in Libya. Further, the feminist movement needs to provide psychosocial support services to feminists and activists to combat the impact of the legal and political hurdles. In fact, the feminist movement in Libya needs much more than just support. The movement needs local and national solidarity. We need to present our issues and burdens as one as Arab women, where we will share lessons learned. Despite the difference in our contexts in our countries, we are facing the same issues just in different forms. My advice to other women in Libya and overall the Arab world, to get angry and advocate for the end of all forms of violence against women. I hope we continue being vocal until we are no longer scared, fearing rejection, or marginalization by decision-makers in our countries.

It is crucial that violence against women is transformed from a “taboo” to a topic discussed openly

Hayat Mirshad

Lebanon

Hayat Mirshad, Lebanese feminist activist and journalist with an interest in women's issues. I am currently the executive director of Fe-Male organization, and the chief editor for the Shari-ka Wa Laken platform. The cumulative knowledge of the feminist struggle in Lebanon played a significant role in many historical moments, one of which is the October 17th uprising. During the uprising, women were at the forefront along with other marginalized women identities like domestic workers, refugees, and LGBTQ members. Aside from the uptick in domestic violence due to the pandemic, Lebanon is witnessing an unprecedented economic crisis and women are bearing the brunt. Some have lost their periods. The ongoing crises drained the feminist movement, which had to respond to humanitarian crises such as the port blast, economic deterioration, and the pandemic. These needs came in place of demanding the adoption of laws for the protection from domestic violence or sexual harassment. Women in Lebanon face unique circumstances due to a few reasons.



**Solidarity is the tool
which we will destroy
patriarchy with**

. Most significantly, the existence of personal laws based on sectarianism, not allowing Lebanese mothers to pass their citizenship to their children, and limiting women's political participation. All in favor of upholding the status quo of the male upper hand. For feminists, the challenges increase. They are targeted by political parties, conservatives, and religiosity. Feminists face slandering, vilifying of speeches, accused of foreign loyalties, breaking up families, and cyber-bullying. This is the response we receive for challenging the patriarchy wherever it is. How could we not challenge it when child marriage is still legal regardless of sect, women are abused and killed in cold blood, and the murderer goes free with a media lifeline to tell his story. How could we not challenge patriarchy when women are abused due to the ubiquitous victim-blaming, leaving no space for survivor care? In my opinion, the feminist movement's primary achievement is its continued existence. Our solidarity is our salvation, and it is the tool with which we will defeat the patriarchy, paving the way for future generations of women and girls that will continue the fight. I believe in the need to create a cadre of women and feminists that will build a comprehensive intersectional vision for women's issues, and that the patriarchy will create tools to oppress and marginalize us.

**Solidarity is the tool with which we
will destroy patriarchy**

Sarah Al-Soujar

Morocco

Sarah Al-Soujar, a Moroccan feminist, women's rights defender, political and social activist working on issues like political detainees, "Al-Reef uprising detainees", and young women for democracy group that was established by Febrary 20th activists to ensure feminist demands are included. During the February 20th uprising, there were new dynamics, new generation of feminists that use new original frameworks instead of classic ones like organizations and party affiliations. The new feminists centered intersectionality in their movement, where they fought for minorities' and detainees' rights, freedom of expression and assembly and organizing, and individual freedoms. The 2011 constitution helped those feminists become more distinguished than other who considered article 19 insufficient to fuel their intersectional uprising. The law still criminalizes consensual relationships, abortions, not fasting, permeates personal freedoms and weaponizes it against dissidents. Young feminists for democracy have worked to alleviate women's issues and made a consious effort to link women's plight to the fight for democracy.



**My message to all comrades;
we resist gracefully
and with dignity**

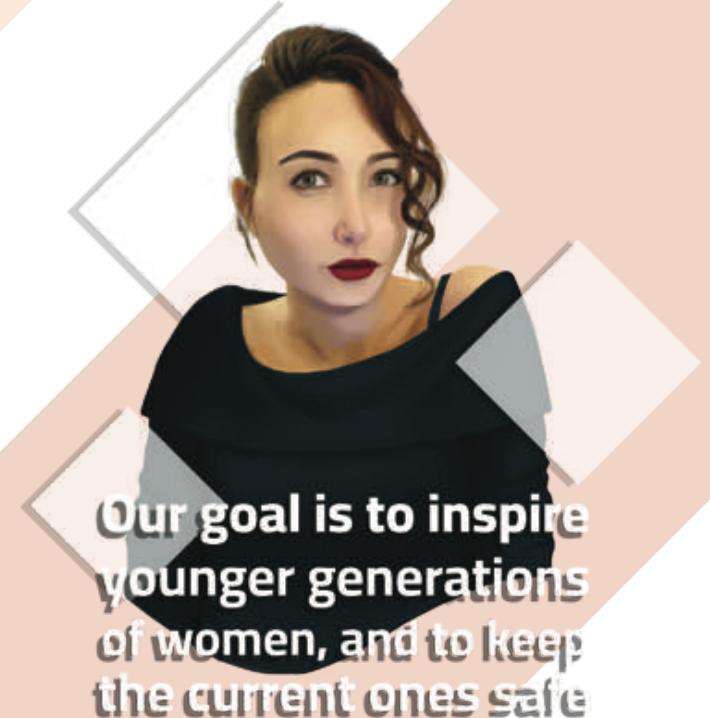
They published a report on the violence faced by human rights defenders, journalists, activists, such as slander, stigmatization, silencing, and detention while practicing their political and civic rights. This violence is committed by regular citizens and authority members. It is vital that feminists from different schools of thought build national, regional, and international solidarity. The kind of targeting they experience impacts their personal lives, security, and political and civic activity. This is why it is important for us to give credit to each other's efforts and build trust. Feminism is an intersectional political movement that is not limited to women and their demands. Rather, it is a fight for freedom. It is a fight for public freedoms, and most importantly, it is a feminist fight. Fighting for marginalized people rights is a feminist fight. What we face in security targeting and abuse is a response to the strength of this fight. We must unite against violence and its perpetrators and its legitimizers. My message to all comrades; we resist gracefully and with dignity...and through solidarity and fighting we will achieve our demands.

**My message to all comrades;
we resist gracefully and with dignity**

Sarah Hinedi

Syria

My name is Sara Hinedi, I'm Syrian and half Lebanese. I'm part of the feminist movement in Syria for more than ten years, in which I've witnessed many changes and challenges within the feminist movement. Feminists within and outside Syria have faced difficult circumstances, even women who don't identify as feminists. I genuinely believe that the personal is political, and that feminism is inherently political. I cannot talk about Syrian feminism without talking about war and oppression. I lost a family member because of the patriarchy, and the patriarchal conservatorship has been present since my youth. That is when the personal becomes political, and that's the reason I am a feminist. I witnessed how Syrian women are treated inside Syria and outside first hand, especially after tracking, exile, and near-death experiences. I witnessed how Syrian refugee women are treated in host countries, with rampant child marriage, and commodifying of Syrian women in the name of marriage and honor. I also witnessed how many of them rebelled by leaving their abusive husbands, and were outspoken about women's conditions in the camps and after immigration.



Our goal is to inspire younger generations of women, and to keep the current ones safe

Others, I witness run campaigns to oust any sexism, rapists, and abusers. The response to those women's actions was full of violence, patriarchy, and toxic masculinity. Police chased some, while others faced smearing campaigns using their personal pictures. Yet, you want to know how the women reclaimed these tools? They responded by opening up a discussion about their right to personal privacy. Many women shattered the patriarchal hegemonic grip on culture, writing, and literature. We shattered it. The unique conditions Syrian women face do not distance them from the shared history and lineage with other types of feminism in South Asia and North Africa. We all strive to reintroduce power dynamics that target women and subject them to violence and killings, and free us from the patriarchal mindset. We do this through public pressure and mobilizing at times, and by centering feminist ideological narratives in advocacy campaigns and opening space for dialogue. To those women I say, yes, you are fighting a violent patriarchal system, but we are all at the forefront with you. You are not alone.

Our goal is to inspire younger generations of women, and to keep the current ones safe.

Joud Hamada

Syria

Joud Hamada, Syrian intersectional feminist. I change everyday, but my love for feminism as an ideology where women defend her entire being will remain constant. The feminist movement in Syria is complicated, despite evolving during the years of war which led countless activists to leave. This caused the gap between those who left and those inside Syria. There are procedural differences between the 70s generation of feminists, who are tackling laws and the constitution, and the generation of the revolution who steers away from ideology and focuses more on social change and use digital tools. The tools they use makes their activism more effective in shifting power dynamics and political clout, and allows for more regional connections. Even though the feminist movement is impacted by the bleak economic climate and the pandemic, the efforts the feminists on the constitutional committee put in and regional solidarity they create with other Arab feminists is noteworthy. The reason the Syrian feminist movement gravitates towards awareness-raising is the belief that no issue takes precedence over other issues.



No issue takes precedence
over other issues

One can find oppression in the household and outside, in the many social, economic, and political avenues of life. I was a feminist even before I knew the term. Feminism to me is a collective life-jacket for all women, and others, in the face of a global patriarchal capitalist world that feeds off of commodifying people. I believe this collective salvation is dependent on our unity and coalition building towards change beyond geographical borders, with its driving force being solidarity.

No issue takes precedence over other issues

Ghadeer Ahmad

Egypt

Ghadeer Ahmad, activist, Egyptian feminist writer, and researcher specialized in women and gender studies.

The feminist movement in Egypt is an accumulative one, with more than a 100 years of women fighting for their political and civic rights. My involvement began after the January 2011 revolution, which allowed for a more encompassing feminist movement beyond restrictions. Before the revolution, those allowed to speak on behalf of women's demands were either the national women's council or civil society organizations. After that, a different generation of feminists came along and declared themselves, their demands, and their mode of operations. They established women's bodily rights as their cornerstone issue to evolving radical demands. This new framework of operation created a momentum around sexual abuse issues, especially due to the repeated rape during protests incidents and that some of those feminists experienced it themselves. They experienced bodily violations in the streets, at work, while protesting, at homes, and within the revolution organizing.



Bodily autonomy rights
are the core to our
feminist narratives

The state then started focusing on it, to protect its reputation with the international community. However, while the state encouraged women to report any incidents, the state also targeted women who used the internet to achieve that goal under the pretense that it tarnishes family values. In creating this patriarchal dynamic, the state gives us crumbs to celebrate on one hand, and takes much more on the other. We are still facing long and hard battles in establishing a standardized law on violence against women, domestic violence, and marital rape, and reforming abortion criminalization laws. We still face security targeting and risks as long as the state hegemony over public space and its criminalization of assembly, and targeting and cyber-bullying by misogynists. We will overcome these challenges by cherishing our solidarity and the diversity of our national and regional frameworks. In addition to my stubborn personality, my drive comes from young women writing letters to tell me I was a guiding light [on their feminist journey], and the support I received from other Arab feminists. We have definitely established a promising regional feminist movement over the last recent years. Together, we will change the reality of violence that targets women regardless of class, social background, and political and religious affiliations. May we build solidarity, and always have women supporting women.

**Bodily autonomy rights are
the core to our feminist narratives**

Amani Ma'moun

Egypt

My name is Amani Ma'moun, a legal consultant at an independent organization in Egypt. 2021 was an overwhelming year. Despite the country and society paying closer attention to sexual violence, the feminist movement was left feeling disappointed. While more support for women to report [sexual misconduct] and arrest of the Fairmont Hotel Rape case were steps in the right direction, the legal taunting of the TikTok Girls embodied a new obstacle. Though we work hard to support women, those in sexual violence cases, in particular, all cases face deep social stigma. The patriarchy haunts us whenever there is feminist work. This results from an entire legal branch of domestic violence being ignored, including all its proposed legislation that includes marital rape, child marriage, and domestic sexual violence. The civil society law was amended to tighten the legal space for this work, in addition to the pandemic and the drying up of donor support. We will not be able to face those challenges unless we overcome our differences as feminists. Feminism is not solely dependent on one person or entity. We need communication and solidarity locally and regionally.



I'm motivated to continue my feminist work because not every woman can escape violence and oppression

We need the legal and executive branches to be allies, not hurdles. We need a supportive social system that does not stigmatize and hold prejudices against women. When disappointment hails, I connect with my colleagues, and we share the stories of the women they worked with. In them, we see a chance for a brighter future and play a role in it as feminists. My drive to continue feminist work stems from my support system, my friends and family, and the thought of every woman that cannot escape violence and oppression. Those are the reasons I continue to do my work, hoping that this work will create a difference, if only in one woman's life.

I'm motivated to continue my feminist work because not every woman can escape violence and oppression.

Rana Al-Husseini

Jordan

Rana Al-Hussainiy, journalist, author, and Jordanian 50's activist. I used my career and activism as a venue to raise awareness about violence against women. I wrote two books, the first one discusses what is commonly known as "honor crimes", and the second one documents the Jordanian feminist movement. I do not really care for labels, I will not object even if you do not label me a feminist. What is more important to me, is that I am working to raise awareness and save women's lives. I am happy that the current generation of young Jordanian feminists are able to build upon and learn from the works of previous generations. The younger feminist generation are also internet-savvy and use it to advocate for women's issues, a tool that was not available before. Here, I want to focus on two issues, Fatima and Ahlam, two domestic violence victims. In the past, there was no self-organization like this, and the government would never allow it so much airtime and take responsibility through publishing legislation and press releases.



**Our priority should be
to unite, and to work
to strengthen each other**

I witness the efforts of the younger feminists and remember when my colleagues and I established “the national honor-crimes committee”, and how it is now bearing fruit with these young women. During these years, the Jordanian feminist movement achieved numerous things. Now, we see women in decision-making positions, go out to protest violence against women, and local narratives centering women’s issues. Additionally, there is the childcare facilities law that was reformed to allow women to resume their jobs, and established safehouses for women. However, the safehouses’ rules and regulations change depending on which minister and government are in office. [This progress is also impacted by the] low percentage of women in the labor market, personal law that needs reform, and the protection against abuse law needing activation. There are also those who dismiss and belittle women’s issues. Those challenges are present, regardless of which generation of feminists we are. This is why I hope that we can one day build solidarity on the fact that we are all women first, and feminists second. I hope and know that every little step forward is bringing us closer to the larger dream.

Our priority should be to unite, and to work to strengthen each other.

Laila Al-Muttawa' Bahrain

Laila Al-Mutawwa', storyteller, journalist, and feminist activist. I look at feminism as a natural reaction by anyone experiencing oppression and prejudice. More importantly, the person needs to have awareness. When I think about the beginning of my journey, I realize I was a feminist even before I fully understood the concept itself. There is no logical reason to attack feminism, or women's treatment as first-class citizens. In Bahrain, and I speak only for myself, we have laws that protect my freedom and independence. Based on that law, I am able to issue a restraining order against any perpetrator and move out to live on my own. But we still demand more. There is a personal effort by women who launched the digital campaign: "Al-Mualqaat Campaign ". In the campaign, the women discussed how men use their authority to harm the wife, to blackmail her, and offer financial compensation when discussing divorce. Women's awareness of their rights was a direct reason for the campaign's success. The state attempted to reform personal law clauses, both the Sunni and the Ja'fari. Due to the conservative pushes and pulls, only the Sunni law was reformed.



Feminism as a natural reaction
by anyone experiencing
oppression and prejudice

. Today, we witness this collective awareness that stems from collective experience and pain of women, who stood strong in the face of any manipulation and defamation of their campaign. My relentless drive stems from my experience as a young girl with no family, social, or economic support. I was deprived of education, employment, and of realizing my rights. This revelation came to me while reading a law book, by chance, that presented a different narrative about women. It presented women in narratives beyond being followers, to be owned, and allowing men to harm them in the name of promoting obedience. What truly empowered me was a law that allowed me to dismiss family authority. I hope for future changes to address inheritance, and a woman being their own legal guardians in marriage. After all, a contract as important as marriage should not be held between a father and a potential partner while treating the woman as a third party. I also hope for Bahraini women to be able to give their citizenship to their children. I hope that civil society is more integrated, and that feminism and women's issues do not turn into points for election candidates's speeches.

Feminism as a natural reaction by anyone experiencing oppression and prejudice



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