

Jordanian women have come a long way, but much work remains to be done

Author:

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AMMAN: Despite improvements in the status of women in Jordan, more still needs to be done to address gender-based violence and increase women's engagement in both society and the labor market, according to rights activists.

In remarks to Arab News on the occasion of International Women's Day, women's rights activists argued that Jordan has achieved "considerable" progress over the past 20 years in combating discrimination against women by revisiting laws and taking on the "social taboos" that keep Jordanian women out of the workforce.

They explained that these changes were the result of changes in society, underlining the need for more efforts at the institutional level toward improving gender equality and women's empowerment.

Rana Hussein, a renowned women's rights activist, said: "With regard to the achievements of the women's rights movement, I would say that one of the most important accomplishments was the appointment of women in decision-making positions such as ministers, criminal prosecutors, ambassadors and judges. Now, you see women almost everywhere. This is a sign that society is more open now toward accepting and wanting women to be in positions of leadership."

Despite changes to social structures and improvements in women's rights in Jordan, the award-winning journalist said there are still problems related to women's labor force participation and their employment status, citing the high unemployment rates among females.

According to official estimates, Jordan's unemployment rate in the third quarter of 2020 stood at 23.9 percent, up 4.8 percent compared with the same period of 2019. The rate of unemployed males who hold a bachelor's degree and higher reached 25.2 percent, while the percentage of unemployed females who hold at least the same degree increased to 77 percent.

"Despite efforts, economic participation among women is still weak," Hussein said, adding that there were still many jobs occupied exclusively by men.

"There is still discrimination in the workplace. Job owners prefer to hire men to get around issues related to maternity leave and childcare."

Honor crimes

On average, 10 to 15 women are killed annually in Jordan in the name of honor, Hussein said.

Husseini, who authored the hard-hitting book, "Murder in the Name of Honor," explained that the figure has seen a "significant drop."

"The number of the so-called 'honor crimes' reported in Jordan during the 1980s and 1990s was between 20 to 25, sometimes reaching 30 every year. Now, after all the work that has been done by activists, awareness campaigns, the government and all those involved in the fight, the number has dropped to 10 to 15 cases."

She explained that Jordan has amended laws related to violence against women, toughening penalties and thus reducing honor crimes.

"There have also been changes to some important clauses pertaining to violence against women, such as articles 98 and 308 of the penal code. Article 308 used to allow a person who sexually assaults a woman to escape punishment if he married the victim. Now, this is no longer the case. The other change is that perpetrators of so-called 'honor crimes' are not receiving lenient sentences as they used to in the past. Now, the criminal courts and justice system are really treating violence against women and children very seriously, and they are bringing cases to court with strong evidence to implicate the defendants."

Husseini explained that Jordanian laws no longer allow a lenient sentence for perpetrators of honor crimes.

"But we still have a problem with the waiving of rights that families can exercise while at court to reduce the sentence.

"Violence against women is not a phenomenon specific to Jordan or the Middle East region but one that is found all over the world. The difference in our region is that women are killed by their families and relatives," Husseini added.

COVID-19 pandemic

Jordanian women's rights leaders said that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has exacerbated women's troubles, worsening women's economic participation and increasing gender-based violence.

According to the Sisterhood is Global Initiative (SIGI), an independent organization seeking women's advancement and empowerment through a range of education and advocacy programs, many women have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic and have been subject to domestic violence.

"The outbreak has proved the centrality of women in the society. The burdens of Jordanian women, especially those on the front lines, have increased during the pandemic, with many of them losing their jobs and suffering various forms of violence from their husbands, fathers and brothers. They have remained silent, in part to protect their families and children but also out of their deep belief that the current circumstances are exceptional and full of economic and social challenges," SIGI said in a recent report.

Husseini said that lockdowns and curfews have been hindering NGOs and

protection teams from performing regular check-up visits to vulnerable families and centers for victims of domestic violence and “family honor.”

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, UN Women said that emerging data and reports from those on the front lines have shown that all forms of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, have intensified.

A recent study by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia concluded that the pandemic is expected to result in the loss of 1.7 million jobs in the Middle East region, including approximately 700,000 jobs held by women.





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Saudi Arabia reforms for women boost economic growth

[Pope meets father of drowned Syrian refugee boy in Irbil](#)

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IRBIL: Pope Francis has met with the father of Alan Kurdi, a 3-year old Syrian boy who drowned crossing the Mediterranean Sea and whose image drew global attention to the plight of refugees fleeing to Europe. Following a Mass on Sunday in the Iraqi city of Erbil, Francis met with Abdullah Kurdi and spent a long time with him, the Vatican said.



Through an interpreter, the pope listened to Kurdi's story and expressed sympathy for the loss of his family. Abdullah thanked the pope for his words. The Kurdi family, who fled from Kobane in Syria, took the route of many Syrian and other migrants in 2015 by sea in a small boat from Turkey heading for Greece. When their boat capsized, Alan Kurdi, one of his brothers and his mother perished. The image of Alan's body, washed up on Turkish shores, came to symbolize the perilous journey to Europe and drew international condemnation. The father now runs a charity in Erbil.





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Pope in Iraq: Terror, death 'will never have the last word' AS IT HAPPENED:
Pope Francis visits Erbil, Mosul on third day of Iraq apostolic tour

[Pope in Iraq: Terror, death 'will never have the last word'](#)

Author:

Sun, 2021-03-07 19:27

ROME: Terrorism and death “will never have the last word,” Pope Francis said on Sunday at a church in the Iraqi town of Qaraqosh, where Christians lived before Daesh occupied it from 2014 to 2016, forcing thousands to flee.

“Even amid the ravages of terrorism and war, we can see, with the eyes of faith, the triumph of life over death,” he added on the third day of his historic visit to Iraq.

He called the Angelus Sunday midday prayer at the Syriac Catholic Al-Tahira Church, which was vandalized and burnt by Daesh and turned into a shooting range. The church has since been completely restored.



Pope Francis arrives to hold a mass at the Grand Immaculate Church, in Qaraqosh. (Reuters)

Pope Francis appeared very moved by the testimonies of Christians from a region that had been devastated by Daesh.

He told Christians in Iraq: “You are not alone. The entire Church is close to you, with prayers and concrete charity. And in this region, so many people opened their doors to you in time of need.”

He added: “The road to a full recovery may still be long, but I ask you, please, not to grow discouraged. What is needed is the ability to forgive, but also the courage not to give up.”

The pope then flew by helicopter to the city of Mosul, where he prayed for the “victims of all wars.”

In Erbil, capital of the autonomous Kurdish region – which was a safe haven for thousands of Christians fleeing Daesh – he held the largest Mass of his visit to Iraq.

He was greeted there by 10,000 cheering faithful gathered in Franso Hariri Stadium, which was at one-third capacity as a measure against the spread of COVID-19.



Caption

In the sermon, Pope Francis praised the Catholic Church in Iraq for “spreading Christ’s mercy and forgiveness, particularly toward those in greatest need.”

He said: “Even amid great poverty and difficulty, many of you have generously offered concrete help and solidarity to the poor and suffering. That is one of the reasons that led me to come as a pilgrim in your midst, to thank you.”

He added: "Today, I can see first-hand that the Church in Iraq is alive, that Christ is alive and at work in this, his holy and faithful people."

Pope Francis then flew to Baghdad, from where he is due to return to the Vatican on Monday morning.





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AS IT HAPPENED: Pope Francis visits Erbil, Mosul on third day of Iraq apostolic tour
Pope Francis' visit provides moral support to Christians of Iraq's Qaraqosh

[B-52s again fly over Middle East in US military warning to Iran](#)

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DUBAI: A pair of B-52 bombers flew over the Middle East on Sunday, the latest such mission in the region aimed at warning Iran amid tensions between Washington and Tehran.

The US military's Central Command said the two B-52s flew over the region accompanied by military aircraft from nations including Israel, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. It marked the fourth-such bomber deployment into the Middle East this year and the second under President Joe Biden.

Flight-tracking data showed the two B-52s flew out of Minot Air Base in North Dakota, something Central Command did not mention in its statement on the flights though authorities later published images of the flight crew preparing its departure there.

The military did not directly mention Iran in its statement, saying the flight was to "deter aggression and reassure partners and allies of the US military's commitment to security in the region."

However, such flights had become common in the last months of former President Donald Trump's administration. Trump's 2018 decision to unilaterally withdraw from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers sparked a series of escalating incidents in the region.

Biden has expressed a desire to return to the deal if Iran honors the deal's limits on its nuclear program. However, tensions remain high after militias in Iraq – likely backed by Iran – continue to target American interests.

Biden last month launched an airstrike just over the border into Syria in retaliation, joining every American president from Ronald Reagan onward who has ordered a bombardment of countries in the Middle East.



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US B-52 bomber again flies over Middle East amid Iran tensions US warns shipping in Middle East of Iran threat as B-52 bombers arrive in Arabian Gulf

[US says will do what is necessary to defend itself after attack in Iraq](#)

Sun, 2021-03-07 17:35

WASHINGTON: The United States will do what it sees as necessary to defend its interests after a rocket attack last week against Iraq's Ain Al-Sada air base, which hosts American, coalition and Iraqi forces, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Sunday.

Speaking on ABC's "This Week" program, Austin said the United States is urging Iraq to quickly investigate the incident at the base located in western Anbar province and determine who was responsible. US officials have said the incident fit the profile of a strike by Iran-backed militia.

"We'll strike, if that's what we think we need to do, at a time and place of our own choosing. We demand the right to protect our troops," Austin said. Asked if Iran had been given a message that US retaliation would not constitute an escalation, Austin said that Iran is fully capable of assessing the strike and US activities.

"What they should draw from this, again, is that we're going to defend our troops and our response will be thoughtful. It will be appropriate," Austin said. "We would hope that they would choose to do the right things."

There were no reports of injuries among US service personnel after the attack but an American civilian contractor died after suffering a "cardiac episode" while sheltering from the rockets, the Pentagon said.

Iraqi officials said 10 rockets landed at the base but the Pentagon was more guarded, saying there were 10 "impacts." It said the rockets appeared to have been fired from multiple sites east of the base, which also was targeted last year by a ballistic missile attack directly from Iran.

US forces carried out air strikes against facilities at a border control point in Syria used by Iranian-backed militias including Kata'ib Hezbollah and Kata'ib Sayyid Al-Shuhada in February. (Reporting by Andrea Shalal; Editing by Will Dunham)



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US contractor dead after rockets hit Iraq base hosting coalition Despite three rocket attacks in a week on US targets in Iraq, Washington yet to respond