



Summary of the Campaign

History is full of extraordinary women, but their stories are seldomly told. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, as elsewhere, the influential names of political and social struggles that are talked about in school or media are overwhelmingly male. Nonetheless, there are also many women who accomplished outstanding achievements and made great sacrifices for their beliefs, often against high odds. In many cases, these women inspired others and made a long-lasting impact on their societies.

Therefore, over the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence of the year 2022, The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Gender and Political Feminism MENA office sets out to identify and tell the stories of some of these influential women who worked towards gender justice. With this anthology, FES shared their inspiring messages to show how manifold the roots of feminism and gender equality are in the MENA region.

Since we had to limit ourselves to sixteen stories only, some hard choices had to be made. Many more stories could and should be told of the women working and fighting for gender justice in the region. Therefore, the list of feminists that was shared during these 16 days do not represent an exclusive one and do not cover the whole lives of the women but focus on their contributions to gender justice within a specific historic, political and social context.

The women whose stories are told are diverse in many aspects: age, class, race, education, and upbringing. Some used their privileged position in society to drive change towards social justice, while others had to fight hard to create space for themselves in the first place. But they all have one thing in common: determination to change the lives of women and girls for the better, and with this they paved the way for women's rights in the MENA region.



Asma Khader was a lawyer and human rights activist, President of Sisterhood Is Global Institute/Jordan (SIGI/J) and Secretary General of the Jordanian National Commission for Women. She served as a Minister of Culture, was a government Spokesperson for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the former President of the Jordanian Women's Union.

She led and contributed to various campaigns to reform legislations for the better realization and protection of the rights of women and girls and established many human rights groups and women's rights organizations, committees and coalitions at the national, regional and global levels.

She initiated and implemented many flagship initiatives and programs including the first legal program and first legal counselling center for women in Jordan. Guided by feminist principles, she dedicated her life fighting injustices through fostering community, solidarity, hope and love and continuously shared the platforms, opportunities and knowledge she had with women's rights defenders to strengthen feminist movements worldwide.



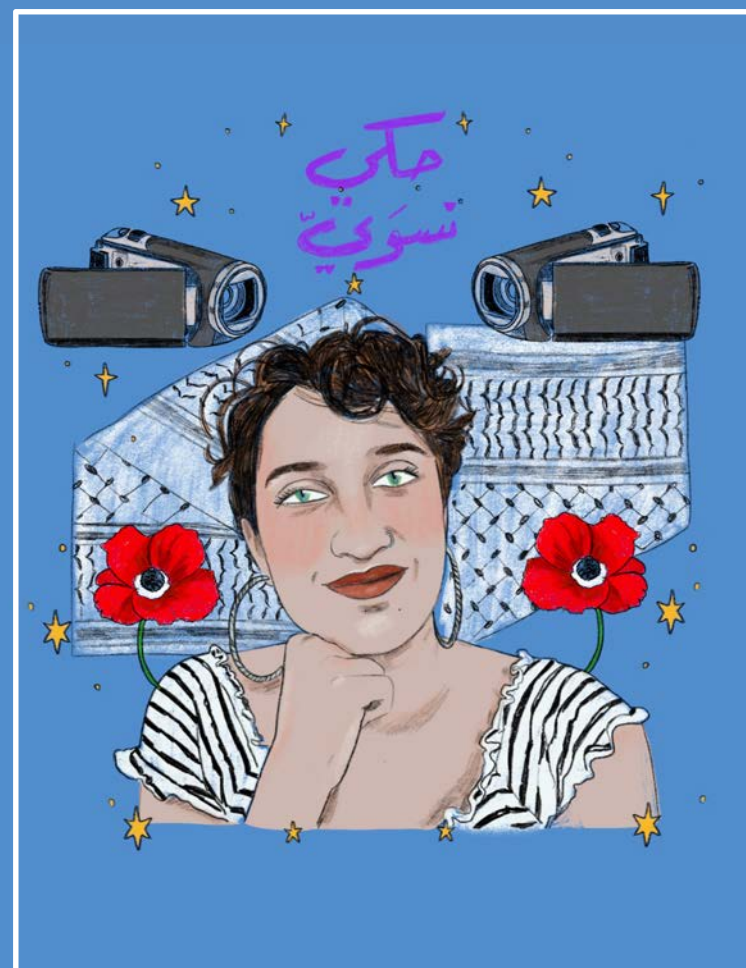
Asma Khader – Jordan (1952-2021)

Sarah is a Palestinian content creator, gender consultant, and trainer born and living in Lebanon. She worked for several years as a sexuality hotline coordinator and later as a knowledge curator within the field of sexual and reproductive health & rights. She currently works in consultancy-based sexuality and gender research, writing, production and training.

Sarah Kaddoura is the creator and host of Haki Nasawi, which she started during quarantine in 2020. "Haki Nasawi" is a channel dedicated to tackling topics in feminism in the Arabic language, through explainer videos on feminist theory and history, social commentary, and myth-busting.

Sarah is also a feminist organizer; during her second year at university, she co-founded the first feminist club with two of her friends at the Lebanese American University. She was also a member of the Dammeh feminist cooperative from 2015 until its dissolution in 2020.

Sarah is passionate about socialist feminism and Palestinian liberation, and she believes in merging the two to counter the injustices of occupation, displacement, and capitalist patriarchy. "A world free from occupation, sexism and economic injustice" is what she dreams of, and it's a world where the word "refugee" has no meaning.



Sarah Kaddoura – Palestine (1995 -)

Born in Casablanca in 1941, Aïcha Ech Chenna is an emblematic figure of Moroccan feminism who fought for the acknowledgment of single mothers' rights and those of children born out of wedlock. After graduating as a nurse, Aïcha worked as a health and social education facilitator until 1985, when she founded the Association Solidarité Féminine (ASF) that defends the rights of abandoned children.

Aïcha fought for more than fifty years to defend single mothers in a country where extramarital relations are punishable by prison and abortion is forbidden, as well as for the recognition of children born out of wedlock, who have long been deprived of a civil status.

Under pressure from activists such as Aïcha, Moroccan Family Law was reformed in 2004, allowing single mothers to choose a family name for their children - until then, this law prevented children born out of wedlock from having a family name without the father's permission.

In March 2015, Aïcha was consulted by the kingdom, under the instruction of the King Mohamed VI, to legalize abortion in extreme cases such as rape or malformations. A first step in the consecration of women's right to decide over their own bodies.

Aïcha chaired ASF until her death in 2022 and devoted the last years of life advocating for the inclusion of sex education in school curriculum in Morocco.



Aïcha Ech Chenna – Morocco (1941-2022)

Rowaida Kanaan is a Syrian activist and journalist who was arrested by the Syrian regime several times for her activism as a radio reporter, documenting the humanitarian circumstances that Syrians were going through.

Kanaan started her career as a math and information teacher, she then worked as a reporter for Radio Rosana in Damascus. After her third arrest, she moved to Turkey and worked as a producer and presenter for radio programs. She had a special program for women's issues and another about Syrian detainees. She worked as an investigative journalist with The Voice Podcast that contributed to the detection of a criminal accused of sexual slavery in Syria.

Kanaan lead the Syrian Women's Network for years, which has been working to empower women politically. She co-founded the Syrian Feminist Political Movement, which works on women's participation in the political process.

In 2017, she moved to France and acted in a play that sheds light on the suffering of detained Syrian women. She began documenting the stories of women detainees and the societal and political injustices they suffered when she was a political prisoner herself. She focuses mainly on the rights of women and detainees, and produced more than 100 radio episodes on women's political, social and legal rights and on women's daily lives.



Rowaida Kanaan – Syria

Zahira Kamal is the head of the Palestinian Democratic Union Party, and the first woman to lead a Palestinian political party. During the period April 2006-May 2012 she was the Director of Palestinian women Research and Documentation Center. She was appointed as the first Minister of Women's Affairs in November 2003. She continued to be as a Minister of Women's Affairs up to April 2006. During the period 1996-2003, Ms. Kamal was the General Director of the Gender Planning and Development Directorate at the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. She worked at UNDP from 1993 to 1995 as Director of the Women in Development Program.

She also taught in Ramallah Women College for twenty-two years teaching physics and methods of teaching science. She obtained a B.Sc. in Physics from Ain Shams University in Cairo, Egypt in 1968 and High Diploma in education from Jordan University in 1978

She has been and still politically and social and women activist, she was a member of the advisory committee to the Palestinian negotiation team for peace negotiation. She has been founding member of several women NGOs; Women Centre for Legal Aid and counseling, Women Studies Centre, Women Affairs Technical Committee, Business Women Association, Jerusalem Link, the International Women Commission for Just Peace between Palestinians and Israelis. Currently she is the chairperson Women Center for legal Aid and Counseling, Women Studies Center, and a board member of Foundation for Future.



Zahira Kamal – Palestine (1945 -)

Linda Matar became engaged in the public sphere from her early childhood and teenage years. She worked at silk factories, where she witnessed first-hand the unequal treatment of young women and girls despite their hard labor. In 1953, she joined the League for Lebanese Women's Rights and became its president in 1978. Linda also helped establish the Lebanese Women's Council, of which she became president in 1996. She further coordinated the regional office of the Women International Democratic Federation. Among her major accomplishments are over 40 years of lobbying for the amendment of the laws that are discriminatory against women. She has also cofounded many women's non-governmental organizations in Lebanon and has represented Lebanon in nearly 60 Arab and regional and international conferences.



Linda Matar – Lebanon (1925 - 2023)

Hoda Elsadda is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Cairo University, a feminist and an activist for women's rights. She co-founded in 1995 the Women and Memory Forum, a research organization that focuses on the production and dissemination of alternative knowledges on women and gender studies. She previously held a Chair in the Study of the Contemporary Arab World at Manchester University and was Co-Director of the Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World in the UK.

She was member of the 50-committee that drafted the Egyptian constitution endorsed in a referendum in 2014 and was coordinator of the Freedoms and Rights Committee in the constitutional assembly.

She is currently working on a project to establish a Gender Oral History Archive for the Arab World at the American University of Beirut in cooperation with the Arab Council for Social Sciences. She is author of *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel: Egypt: 1892-2008* (Edinburgh UP and Syracuse UP, 2012); and co-editor of *Oral History in Times of Change: Gender, Documentation and the Making of Archives* (Cairo Papers, 35:1, 2018).



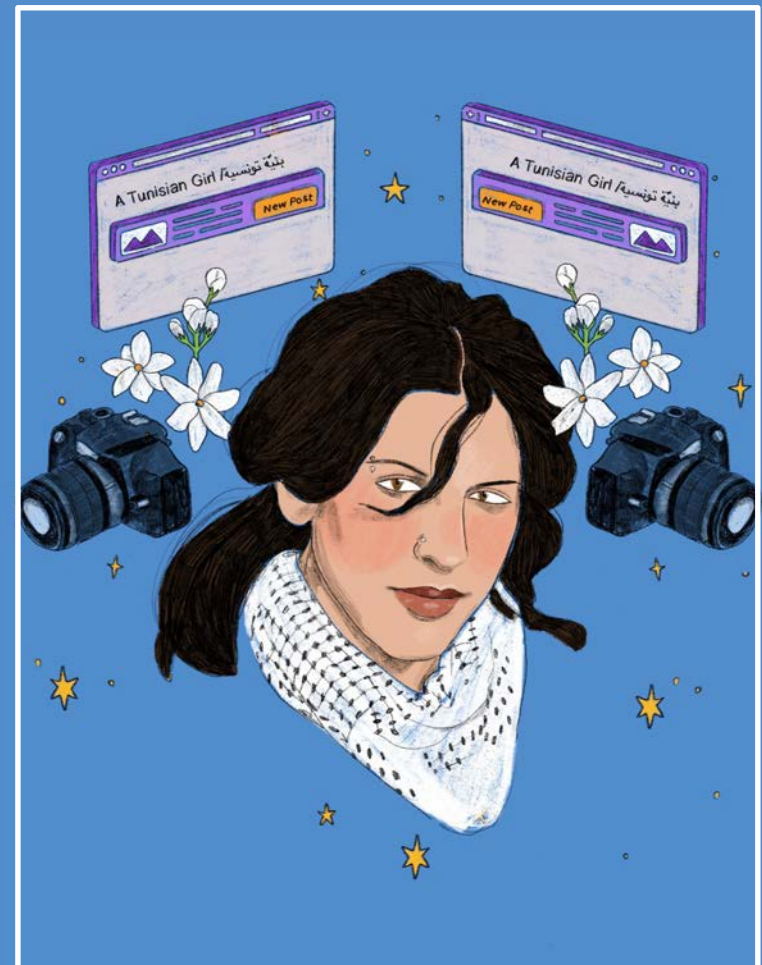
Hoda Elsadda – Egypt (1958 -)

Lina Ben Mhenni was a Tunisian Internet activist, blogger and lecturer in linguistics at Tunis University. Ben Mhenni became well known for her "A Tunisian Girl" blog, documenting human rights abuses under the rule of former Tunisian President Zine El Abidine. Ben Mhenni was one of the few bloggers to blog using her real name rather than adopting a pseudonym to protect her identity. Her blog, as well as her Facebook and Twitter accounts, were censored under the Ben Ali regime in 2007.

But in the 2011 uprising that toppled the longtime autocrat, Ben Mhenni began blogging once again, becoming a vital source of information through her documentation in English, French and Arabic of the violent crackdown on protesters by police, particularly in Sidi Bouzid, Regueb and Kasserine. Her blog soon gained international recognition. In 2011, she was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize and received the Best Blog Award at the Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum in Germany's Bonn.

In 2013, following the assassinations of leftist politicians Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi, she was informed by authorities of being "number 1 on a kill list" drawn up by hardline groups. Despite her ailing health and needing a kidney transplant, Ben Mhenni participated in her last years in many panels and cultural events, most recently at the Arab Women Literature Festival, and she campaigned for Tunisia's youth and a reading initiative in Tunisian prisons.

Ben Mhenni died at 36 following a long battle with the autoimmune disease, lupus.



Lina Ben Mhenni – Tunisia (1983-2020)

Assia Djebar, born Fatima-Zohra Imalayen, was a novelist, translator, filmmaker, and one of North-Africa's best-known and most widely acclaimed writers. In her books, Djebar has explored the struggle for social emancipation and the Muslim woman's world in its complexities. Her strong feminist stance has earned her much praise.

In 1962, year of the Algerian independence, she published 'Children of the New World'. It depicted the role women played in the Algerian war for independence against France. In her books "Amour, la fantasia" (1985) and "Loin de Médine"(1991), she gives body and voice to forgotten Algerian and Muslim heroines. Later in 1995, the narrator transgresses one of the rules governing the relationship between women and men in Arab-Muslim societies, the rule of "modesty and invisibility" in her novel "Vaste est la prison" which tells the story of a married woman in love with her work colleague.

By moving women from the margin to the forefront of her recreated history as opposed to the national history which retraces accomplishments of men revolutionaries, Djebar documents women's historic roles as revolutionaries and makes the case that they deserve status as full citizens in the new nation they have helped to build. She dedicated a part of her life and her writings to question the patriarchal lecture of women's participation.



Assia Djebar – Algeria (1936 – 2015)

Hanaa Edwar was born in the Southern city of Basra, Iraq, and earned a degree in law from Baghdad University in 1967. During her 50 years as an advocate, she has led countless campaigns for gender equality, including efforts to advance women's role in drafting the country's new constitution in 2005. Alongside allies, she secured a minimum 25 percent women's quota in the parliament and in the local governments.

She is the co-founder and chairperson of Iraqi Al-Amal Association, a local NGO established in 1992, which is being actively participated on rehabilitating citizens and influencing the social conscience to build up peace, promoting human rights founder and sustainable development in Iraq. She is the co-founder of the Iraqi Women Network, which consists of more than 90 women's organizations and groups. She has led countless campaigns for women's and gender equality, enhancing women's role in decision-making positions and in the Constitutional process. Edwar co-founded Arab Women Court in 1995 and the Arab Non-Governmental Network for Development (ANND) in 1996, based in Beirut.

Since 2010, Edwar served within the Expert Team drafting the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence in Iraq. She is leading the advocacy campaign and lobbying in Parliament to enact the law.



Hanaa Edwar – Iraq (1940 -)

Salwa Bugaighis was a human rights lawyer renowned throughout Libya for her work defending political prisoners arrested by the Qaddafi regime. In early 2011, Salwa gained further notoriety as one of the first women to take part in protests against the Qaddafi regime in front of the courthouse in Benghazi. These protests would subsequently lead to the full outbreak of revolution.

Throughout Libya's revolution, Salwa continued to play a prominent political role, including her work as an organizer of the February 17 coalition – the body responsible for forming Libya's first opposition government in over four decades.

Salwa struggled tirelessly to ensure women's presence and participation in decision-making and society. She was one of the founders of the Libyan Women's Platform for Peace. She earned deep respect for her unbending resolve and commitment to the initial goals of the revolution, resigning from her position within Libya's National Transitional Council after three and a half months in protest at the lack of women in the new government.

Salwa was assassinated right after she voted in the 2014 Parliament elections, and appeared on television encouraging people to carry out their electoral duty, and since then no one has been brought to justice for her murder.

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Salwa Bugaighis – Libya (1963 – 2014)

Parvin Ardalan is an Iranian woman with a Kurdish background and a leading Iranian women's rights activist, writer and journalist. She is the editor of the feminist websites Iranian Feminists Tribune, Zanestan, and Change for equality. She co-founded the Women's Cultural Center and the One Million Signatures Campaign, a grass roots movement aimed at repealing discriminatory laws against women in Iran. She was awarded the Olof Palme Prize in 2007 for her struggles for equal rights for men and women in Iran.

Ardalan co-initiated Feminist Dialog and the process "Women Making HERstory" 2013-2016 to unveil and re-write the history of immigrant women through 100 years in the city of Malmö. Currently she is the project leader of "Migration Memory Encounters" where the knowledge, experiences and memories of migrants in various cultural fields are being re-discovered and performed in Sweden.



Parvin Ardalan – Iran (1967 -)

Fatima was born and raised in Fez in a harem that belonged to her affluent paternal grandmother and comprised two extended families and various female kin and servants. In her memoir *Dreams of Trespass* (1994), she describes how the harem's hudud ("sacred frontier" in Arabic), which separated women from the outside world, came to represent man-made and oppressive borders.

Fatima studied sociology at Mohammed V University in Rabat, followed by graduate studies at the Sorbonne, and a PhD at Brandeis University in the US. Fatima returned to Rabat to teach at Mohammed V University in the Faculté des Lettres. Active in social and political causes, she was a founding member of La Caravane Civique, a group of Moroccan intellectuals dedicated to the education of rural Moroccan women. Fatima contributed to and supported the first newspaper issued by a feminist group ("8 mars"), whose first issue appeared in November 1983. She also backed the creation of one of the first feminist association in Morocco, the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women, created in June 1985.

Fatima Mernissi is one of the most prominent Islamic feminists, with a posthumous legacy of seminal scholarly contributions in the areas of feminism, women studies, and Islamic studies. Her books were widely received around the world and acclaimed for their audacity in engaging with the thorny questions of women's issues in Islam and in Muslim societies.



Fatema Mernissi – Morocco (1940-2015)

Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim was the first woman to be elected to parliament, and becoming the first female parliamentary deputy in the Middle East in 1965. Her political activism could not be separated from her feminism, and vice versa. She spent her early years challenging British colonial rule in Sudan and the postcolonial military government of Ibrahim Abboud, while also co-founding the Sudanese Women's Union (SWU), which went on to campaign for and secure the right of women to vote, receive maternity pay and a pension. She also founded the first women's magazine "Sawt al-Mara, or Women's Voice", that was concerned with woman's political & economic rights.

While serving in parliament, she put forward proposals for many reforms for the attainment of women's rights including draft laws for equal pay for equal work, paid maternity leave, abolishment of the house of obedience (where women were forced to go back to their husband's house by police order), adjustments to the personal status law, and the right of women to higher education. All the laws she put forward were later adopted in 1969.

Despite harassment and the execution of her husband in 1971, and a house arrest of two-and-a-half years, Ibrahim continued to work for the rights of women until her death in 2017.



Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim – Sudan (1933-2017)

Toujan Al-Faisal is a human rights activist and a former TV journalist, who was Jordan's first woman member of parliament to win elections without a quota. She served as a member of the parliament from 1993 to 1997.

Al-Faisal rose to fame in the early 1990s through battles with Islamic groups in Jordan over subjects like polygamy and later on in the Lower House over dress code.

As a reporter and on-camera news presenter for state-run Jordan Television, Faisal starred in documentaries that advocated a wide array of human rights, women's rights chief among them. Her yearlong series in 1988-89, titled "Women's Issues," particularly enraged Jordan's fundamentalist leaders with its frequent exploration of problems such as wife beating and inequities in Jordan's inheritance and divorce laws. She organized workshops to advocate the basic right of Jordanian women passing their nationalities to their children.



Toujan Al-Faisal – Jordan (1948 -)

Born in 1908, Cherifa Messadi was among the first Tunisian women to attend school and to obtain the patent in Sfax. Messadi was General Secretary of the Trade Union of Technical and Vocational Education from 1947 to 1968 and also member of the Board of the National Federation of Education.

In 1951 at the 4th congress of the UGTT, Messadi was elected member of the Executive Board, and for three quarters of a century this fact remained unique. She served for 3 years at the Administrative Commission while the leader Farhat Hached was Secretary General. She successfully chaired one of the most difficult congresses of the UGTT.

She was the only woman in the general assemblies, but still did not hesitate to speak up and was often the only woman in May Day parades and public demonstrations. As national figure and the first woman union leader in the Arab world, Cherifa Messadi remained in the memory of union activist as an exception that confirms the rules.



Cherifa Messadi – Tunisia (1908-1990)



Throughout the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, FES Gender and Political Feminism MENA office aimed to introduce you to exceptional women from around the MENA region who have dedicated their lives to fight various forms of discrimination practiced against women, including GBV. These women have stories of transformation, empowerment, and breaking down barriers and social taboos, not only to make their voices heard, but to push others to challenge the status quo and speak up.

We hope you enjoyed getting to know these women and reading their stories as much as we enjoyed bringing them to life in this collection. And always remember, that these names could have been in our history classes and textbooks if only we lifted up and celebrated women the same way we do men.

So, let's start now!

The campaign was prepared in collaboration with the gender focal points of all FES offices in the MENA region and was broadcasted on FES MENA's social media pages (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter).

All illustrations of this campaign are done by Nour Flayhan.



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