

The Protester's Guide

for Women in the Middle East
and North Africa



The Protester's Guide

for Women in the Middle East
and North Africa

Author:

Maya El Ammar

Reviewed by:

Sarah Cheikh Ali, HuMENA organization

Illustration:

Sara Khayat

HuMENA seeks to provide information to the public in an open-source manner. Therefore, this guide can be used freely as long as the source is clearly specified. If the source is not mentioned, the organization reserves its right to act against anyone who uses the guide and its contents without mentioning the source.



HuMENA For Human Rights and Civic Engagement
HuMENA pour les Droits de l'Homme et l'Engagement Civique
هيوميننا لحقوق الإنسان والمشاركة المدنية

All copyrights reserved for HuMENA Rights and Civic Engagement 2023 ©

ICNL

INTERNATIONAL CENTER
FOR NOT-FOR-PROFIT LAW

Table of Contents

Prologue: Your right to peaceful assembly.....	1
1.1 Before you head to the protest.....	6
• What should you know?.....	6
• Basic information.....	6
• What should you do?.....	7
• Digital and logistical preparations.....	8
• Your protest-friendly bag.....	9
1.2 While in the protest.....	10
• From tear gas to sexual harassment: How should you deal with risks and violations?..	10
• How to act in case of arrest?.....	13
• What are the best documentation practices?.....	14
1.3 After leaving or dispersing the protest.....	16
• The way back.....	16
• Possible reactions: From stalking to cyber-harassment campaigns.....	16
Section II: Additional resources and trusted contacts.....	20



Prologue: Your right to peaceful assembly

Throughout history, women have contributed to changing the destinies of their countries, making bold and courageous moves in the face of occupation and authoritarian, corrupt regimes, as well as patriarchal, sexist and unjust policies and practices. However, while making history, women have had to challenge multifaceted obstacles, in both public and private spheres, imposed on them merely for being women, hindering their full or safe participation in political and public life, trade union meetings, strikes, sit-ins, protests, confrontational acts, marches and other forms of peaceful assembly.

In recent years, women and girls have been more and more exposed to offline and online harassment, hate speech and disinformation campaigns. Violence has particularly soared against women politicians and human rights defenders, especially feminist activists, indicating a growing wave of hostility towards women's effective participation in public and political life and the emergence of dangerous attempts to undermine their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly through various methods, some of which are new while others are all too familiar. Indeed, most deployed tactics derive from the same old archaic concept of male guardianship over women's lives, bodies and decisions, and can include, to name a few: defamation, reputation-tarnishing on digital platforms, malinformation and disinformation, the spread of falsehoods about women's work and the disclosure of private details with the aim of stigmatizing them, direct threats, insults, verbal violence -and at times physical and sexual violence- as well as online blackmail and extortion, among other harmful acts.

In theory, it is important to note that the participation in or formation of peaceful assemblies is a fundamental human right stipulated in major international instruments, such as [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), [The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), in addition to [ILO](#) conventions on the rights of workers in organizing and collective bargaining; but also in regional charters, such as [The Arab Charter on Human Rights](#) and [the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights](#). Moreover, women's rights treaties have come to re-enshrine their right to assembly and participation. These conventions were originally developed to address the historical discrimination still practiced against women even after the adoption of trailblazing treaties, preventing them from enjoying their full human rights on an equal basis with men, foremost of which was the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW](#)), which guaranteed women their right to participate in public life, specifically in its seventh article.

This right has been mentioned, albeit in a lesser degree or in shy terms, by a number of national policies in several Arab countries. To date, existing and foreseen policies have not clearly and straightforwardly addressed the importance of the right to peaceful assembly and the steps necessary to protect it. To add salt to injury, the matter has been increasingly and intentionally overlooked, given the growing restrictions on freedoms and the direct violence inflicted by state authorities against dissidents and activists. However, if we take a closer look at the constitutions in many Arab countries, such as the constitutions of Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt and Sudan, we will read that rights related to peaceful assembly and forming or belonging to associations or political parties -rights that are at the heart of freedom of expression and opinion- are safeguarded and protected (as long as those who exercise them do not threaten public safety, public order or the rights of others). These constitutions also clearly uphold the principle of equality between citizens before the law in relation to duties and rights; therefore, both men and women automatically enjoy the right to peaceful assembly and protest equally.

Needless to say that national laws will differ from one Arab country to the other in terms of the conditions required for organizing a protest, or in terms of the laws and policies that discriminate against women and girls, or the legal gaps and procedures that are in contravention with the principles of international law, such as those we find, for example, in labor laws or penal codes in Lebanon, or in anti-terrorism laws issued over the last decade in Egypt and Tunisia, or in decisions to restrict political activity within universities in Egypt.

However, it is important to note that these controversial articles, restrictions and gaps can often be challenged by referring and adhering to the principle of the supremacy of international treaties approved by these countries over ordinary laws on the one hand, and by model jurisprudence and exemplary verdicts, on the other hand, especially those limiting the attempts by security forces or the army to pounce on the right to peaceful assembly and only requiring citizens to notify the authorities of their planned action, without this meaning that spontaneous protests or acts of resistance are illegal or can be faced with crackdown.

Of course, the above should not imply that the situation on the ground is rosy, nor that some of the aforementioned conditions are acceptable or not vague, but it was imperative for us to stress that the right to peaceful assembly, including your right as a woman to join or initiate an assembly or gathering, is an intrinsic human right that no one is entitled to violate or deprive you of. People from the MENA region, in all their diversity, must hold on to this right, enjoy it and use it while always being aware that it is a basic right protected by the constitution of their country as well as several regional and international charters and instruments to which their governments adhere.

Throughout history, experience has shown us that there will always be one or more groups of people who will refuse to turn a blind eye to the harms their countries are causing

or inflicting, especially those located in the Middle East and North Africa region, where un-democratic systems and policies of impoverishment prevail, as well as blatant racism and discrimination, all of which would sooner or later be exposed and confronted; for if history has taught us something, it is that even in the most authoritarian of regimes and violent of states, social movements and protesting through various means will remain an invincible reality that cannot be abolished, no matter the scale of sacrifice.

But all dissidents, activists and protesters, whether in our region or globally, are not a homogeneous category of human beings and therefore do not belong to one gender, one race, one religion or enjoy the same privileges, but rather hail from different geographies, ethnicities, age groups, social classes, and gender identities. And if the act of protesting and opposing is by itself associated with considerable challenges in MENA countries -it goes without saying that these challenges vary in intensity and frequency from one country to the other- and if the act of protesting in this region is more often than not associated with the risks of repression, violence and arrest, these challenges multiply even further for non-conforming, non-white individuals, and women, especially those coming from suppressed and impoverished classes, ethnic minorities, and migrant communities.

While the numbers of women detained on activism and political backgrounds may generally be smaller than those of men detained on the same backgrounds, one cannot deny that the detention experiences and their repercussions vary greatly for female detainees or female relatives of male detainees. Moreover, on top of the hardships and injustices faced by the protesting groups, and in addition to the general police violence and risks emanating from the prevalent politicization of the judicial systems in MENA which affect everyone, women -and other marginalized groups- face additional challenges that are also internal, in the sense that the danger may sometimes come from the protester group itself, and from women's surrounding communities, as well as their own families. Hence, women participating in peaceful assemblies and protests find themselves in intertwined battles: some are fought with the authorities and their assisting bodies, others are fought with members of the protesting communities, while others are fought with their closest, most intimate circles.

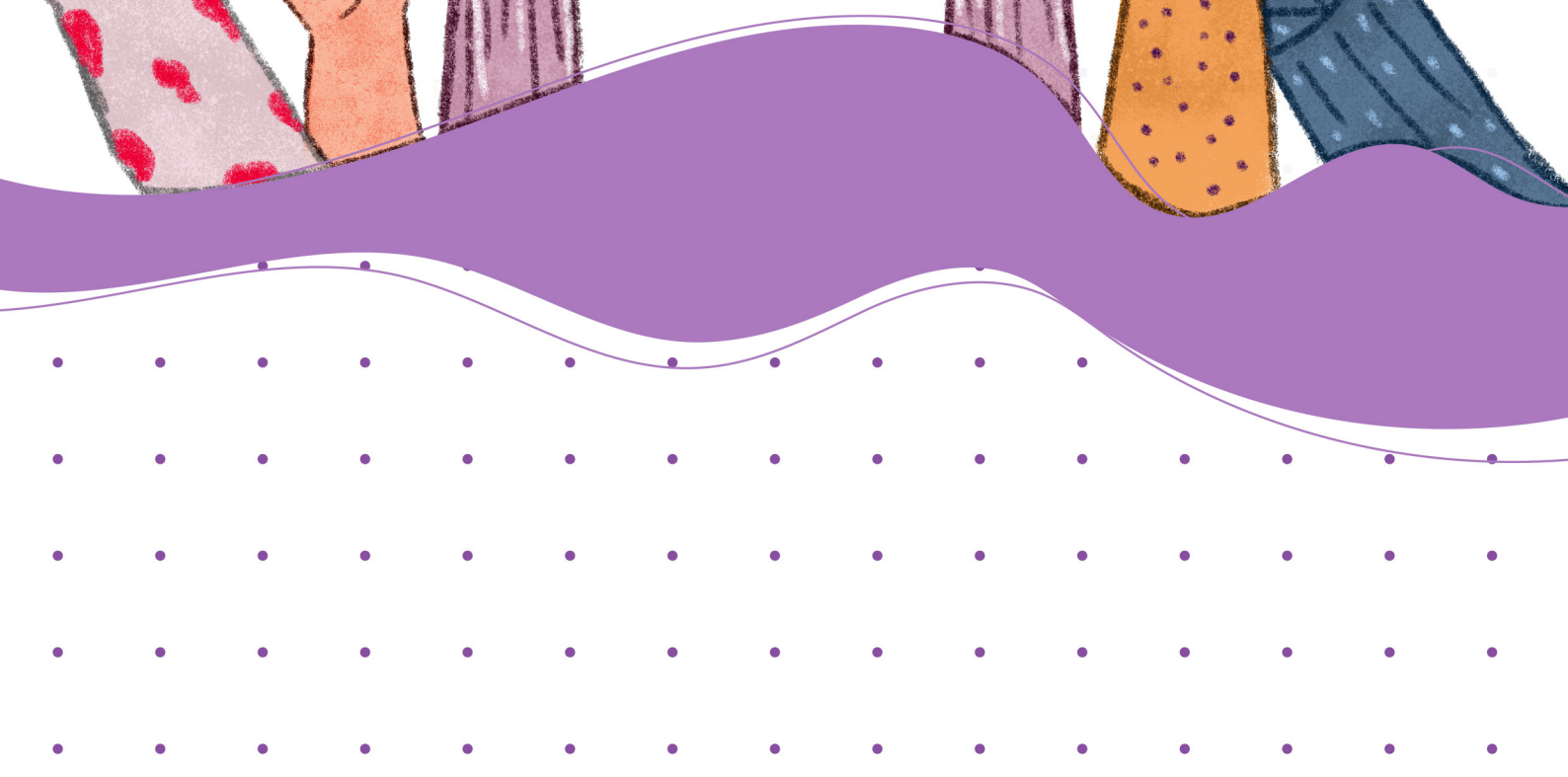
In this context, this guide was produced to acknowledge all these complexities, and provide women who wish to organize, create public-facing initiatives or protest against injustices, with some practical information to help improve their protection on the ground and that of their surroundings. The guide is also a reminder of some of the best visual documentation practices during protests and offers important security tips, while fully recognizing the injustice and burden behind the fact that victims and survivors must both learn about and deal with all these tips and tricks in order to better protect themselves, while perpetrators go about their daily lives peacefully.

The "Protester's Guide" was produced to complement other reference publications that we

encourage you to read, such as the [“Manual for Women Defenders”](#) prepared by Clement Nyaletsossi Voule, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and the Right of Association, which contains valuable rights-based and practical information, as well as the booklet “Your Guide to the Right to Peaceful Assembly” and the study “Legal Framework and Public Policies for Women’s Right to Peaceful Assembly” published by [The Human Rights and Civil Rights organization HuMENA](#).

In short, if this booklet has fallen into your hands, it is because it was meant to reach you. Treat it as a friendly “Pocket Guide” that has quick and important tips you, your friends, colleagues or comrades might need throughout your journey to protest. But most importantly, it is that “Pocket Guide” that acknowledges women’s diverse experiences, your own courage, but also your fears, while never compromising your absolute right to participate, lead, express, and resist.

Section I



Before you head to the protest

What should you know?

Unprecedented inflation in prices of basic goods. The deterioration of the national currency. The lifting of the state's subsidy of essential commodities. Systematic arrest of dissenting opinion holders. The state's failure to secure protection for women victims of violence. Allowing rapists and abusers to escape justice. The escalation of repressive acts against journalists. The collapse of the health sector and medicine shortage. The deportation of migrants. Discrimination against women in personal status laws. The arbitrary disbursement of workers. The slavery-like sponsorship system. Banks looting people's deposits. The punishment and oppression of LGBTQ+ individuals...

Types of oppression are many, and with time, they amass to form a common motivation, a shared anger, a trigger to raise voices, mobilize, act against injustices, and commit to what's right in the face of a litany of wrongs. You are driven by the will to promote rights-based narratives and credible information against power narratives and disinformation campaigns, and by a deep desire to put forth a more just solution. And so, you decide to initiate or participate in a protest or any other form of public action. What should you know and do before participating?

Basic information

- * First, hold on to your right to peaceful assembly because it is an absolute right for you, and no authority or person is allowed to deprive you or prevent you from enjoying it.
- * However, authorities can limit this right at exceptional times, provided their measures are based on a clear legal basis; that they result from an utmost necessity; and that they constitute a last resort- conditions that are usually difficult to secure.
- * The authorities request that they be informed in advance of any planned move, but you should know that the failure to inform them does not justify the use of force against participants or any disrespect of their right to express. Remember the principle of necessity and proportionality (unarmed v/s armed; civilians v/s soldiers; etc.).
- * Acts of confrontation and resistance do not make a protest a violent one that deserves violent reactions and crackdown. The first duty of the security forces is to protect the people, and open or organize alternative routes if some roads are blocked by protesters, for example.
- * It is your right to protest and object as a citizen, as a refugee, or as a stateless person. No one has the right to prosecute you for that, but it is important to research and understand the repercussions of participation before deciding whether to participate or not.

especially in contexts dominated by racism, vengeful acts and failed systems and states.

- * Search for legal bodies or groups that support protesters when they are violated or arrested by the authorities. You can refer to the table at the end of this guide for more.
- * Always make sure to go through important details related to the time and place of the gathering or protest, as well as the names of the organizers or participating associations, and then try to predict which security authorities are likely to be present at the location (would it be the Parliamentary Council Guards, the Riot Police, the Internal Security Forces, the Army, the National Security Service, etc.) Knowing beforehand might help prepare you should things rage on the ground.
- * Think about who might participate from groups or people you know and trust.
- * Try to estimate the scale of the move: will it attract media coverage and personnel, will the protesters be many, or will they be easily singled out and perhaps captured?
- * Share this information with friends who are participating, but also with someone you trust from outside the protest, if possible.

What should you do?

- * Please pick comfortable clothing, especially when going to marches and protests that may last a long while.
- * Picture the protest location as a map in your head before going there, or search for the location on the Internet or Google Maps in case you weren't familiar with it.
- * Upon your arrival, put your phone aside for a few, look around you to better understand the geography of the place and the distribution of security forces and ambulances on the ground, check to see if there are familiar faces, and try to identify exit options.
- * In big protests where you can sense that things might escalate, it is useful to consult and agree with your friends or fellow protesters on specific meeting points in the event of unforeseen separation, and on at least two names from the group to follow up with in case of emergency, such as if you are injured, arrested, or photographed in a way you did not consent to, etc.
- * In overcrowded protests, Internet connectivity becomes less accessible and slower, so it is useful to agree with your friends on a meeting point at a certain hour in case of unscheduled parting and to download Bluetooth-based chat apps for conversations within close ranges. Check the digital preparations section below for more.
- * Where possible, share with your lawyer your decision to participate in a gathering which you know will happen in a hostile context and might be dominated by security forces, particularly when you're aware that your name or face are known and were previously

wanted by the authorities or their aides on the ground.

- * Look for the hotline number provided by some associations or groups of volunteer lawyers willing to provide free legal support to protesters. Save the number on your phone and make sure to add it to the palm of your hand or different parts of your arm where you can easily see it.
- * Share the number with co-protesters and someone you trust from outside the gathering.

Digital and logistical preparations

- * It is impossible to summarize the steps needed to improve your cybersecurity. Many publications address this issue in depth, but here are some quick tips to memorize:

Old but gold: Make sure your mobile phone is fully charged. To maintain longer battery life, you can turn off some apps and automatic Wi-Fi search.

- * Depending on your context, the nature of the action, and the expected levels of tension, consider the possibility of leaving your primary phone at home and using another “dumbphone” if you’re not planning to film, document and engage on social. At a minimum, make sure you don’t keep private apps and their contents -especially social media and messaging apps- private photos, personal and sensitive information, and group conversations related to the protest or sit-in, if you are among the organizers.
- * It is best to replace the “Open Device with Face Recognition” feature with the “PIN” feature while participating in public gatherings and actions.
- * Use only encrypted and password-enabled messaging apps, and secure emails like “Proton mail”.
- * Always have dual or multi-factor authentication on all social media apps and your email, and make sure you are signed out of your personal accounts on your laptop as well.
- * When the Internet is out, whether intentionally or due to pressures on networks, you and your companions can use the Bridgefy app that allows chat via Bluetooth in close ranges.

Your protest-friendly bag

Prepare a small “protest-friendly” backpack and make sure it has:

- * Power bank, or charger cable, especially if you intend to film using your phone
- * A bottle of water
- * Biscuits or chocolate
- * Tissues
- * Glasses, goggles or a special mask to protect your eyes and face from tear gas, especially when tensions are expected
- * Eyeglasses, because contact lenses can be very annoying if tear gas is released
- * A scarf wet with vinegar or lemon juice in a closed nylon bag, and an onion
- * Spare scarf, pants and a sweater
- * Empty memory cards if you are using a professional camera
- * Strap or collar for your professional camera
- * Small first aid box



While in the protest

From tear gas to sexual harassment: How do you deal with risks and violations?

As previously mentioned, you must be well prepared, mentally, and emotionally, gather as much useful information as possible before heading to the protest, and inspect the place upon arrival to better visualize entry and exit points, the position and spread of security forces, the locations of official institutions and street cameras, where present, and check if familiar people are on the ground with you. Try to sense the pulse of the streets. Should things suddenly escalate, you and other protesters are likely to be subjected to police or armed forces violence, attacks by security officers penetrating the gathering or infiltrating through officers wearing civilian clothes, attempts to arrest groups of protesters and drive them to known or unknown security or detention centers, to verbal and/or physical harassment by other protesters or, in some instances, by security officers, and, of course, to sexist and harmful comments. Therefore, **it is important that you try to stick to the following protective measures to minimize damage and harm, to the extent possible:**

Police brutality

* Try not to leave your group or get too far when tensions arise. Hold each other's hands or sleeves to make it difficult for hostile security forces coming towards you to hurt you or take you.

* Remember to intentionally look at the uniform of the officers attacking or standing to find out which security branch they belong to. If you are a little far from the violence, try to photograph the events in order to document them or broadcast them live through social media platforms. When documenting or sharing what happened, avoid exaggeration or inaccurate information to preserve the credibility of your narrative and block any official attempts to discredit you.

* When security forces fire- whether live or rubber bullets- protect your head first, and quickly head to a safe corner surrounded by walls. Try to leave the place as soon as possible, even if you were recording/documenting,

* because your life is the most precious asset. Remember the entry and exit points you identified.

* If tear gas is released, run away from the gas in the opposite direction to the wind, and go to a higher place where possible.

* Use goggles and/or the wet vinegar or onion-drenched scarf in your bag, and then use the new scarf to protect your face again. Stay away from the smoke and inhale from the onion directly to your face. Afterwards, you can try to help those around you. Avoid washing your face with normal water.

* When you're under attack, you should always aim to protect the sensitive areas of your body first, such as the head and abdomen.

Harassment

- * Stick together as a group, to as much as you can. If you fall victim to sexual harassment, you can tell a trusted co-protester or friend. Assess the situation, and if you deem it as safe, you can also face the harasser together. If you are alone, try joining other women or mingle into a mixed group.
- * If you identify the face or name of the harasser or stalker, you can photograph and report them later, in case you decide to file a complaint, or expose their name, or alert other people, knowing that these kinds of resistance acts may lead the accused to file a defamation lawsuit against you, discredit you, or stigmatize you.
- * In case of physical/sexual assault or any direct risk to your safety, keep the evidence. Try not to rush home to take a shower, as you may decide to document the offence with the help of a forensic doctor and perhaps file a complaint later.
- * You may feel like you need support, and this is completely normal. Do not hesitate to ask someone you trust to listen to you or seek help from friends or a competent association, collective or authority.
- * Remember: The reason behind the harassment is always the harasser, never you or your clothes or the way you walk or the way you talk, and never your decision to participate in the protest or the late hour!
- * If you are among the organizers, plan the promotion of the principles and intervention methods in cases of harassment. Share the information with your group and the participants you know. One well-known intervention model to support someone who's being harassed is the 5D rule: Distract, Delegate, Document, Delay, Direct.

Arrest

- * Arrest orders can often take place unexpectedly, sometimes at the onset of the protest. They constitute a clear violation of your right to protest and assemble. Try to keep an eye on the course of events around you and get further away from the scene before the attacks and attempts to arrest protesters escalate. Try to move in groups.
- * If you get caught, yell out your name so that your friends or those around you hear it and inform a lawyer. You can also choose to turn on the “Live location” feature with one (or more) people you trust from inside and outside the protest. It may help uncover the truth of your absence and your custody status.
- * Keep silent throughout the drive to the detention center and try to ignore any provocations by the heavily armed security forces. Try to remember their faces, if possible.
- * You might laugh about this, but do make sure you and your co-protesters are not carrying any prohibited drugs so that your case doesn't get even more complicated in court.
- * Equip yourself with the legal knowledge that will help you to protect and defend your rights (such as your right to a lawyer, to contact someone you trust be it a friend or a family member, and to be protected from all forms of torture and abuse, etc.) Remember the lawyers' group's phone number you saved, and contact them if you need to. Share the knowledge and any information you find useful with those around you, whenever you can and if safe to do so.
- * Always remind yourself that you are not alone in this. Try to draw strength from those around you and give them support and strength as well. Feel what you need to feel, the pain, the anger, the fear; and most importantly, be ready for the possibly long confrontation and breathe deeply.

How to act in case of arrest?

In general, national constitutions and laws protect your right to a fair trial, defense, and a lawyer's presence before answering any question during investigations. No security officer has the right to inspect the devices you own before a clear court order is issued; however, police officers, juniors and seniors, may do this anyway, hence our recommendation that you always prepare yourself for different scenarios.

Security forces can launch indiscriminate arrest campaigns, on the orders of the political authorities, with the aim of intimidating protesters and teaching them a "lesson" to redirect them and others from taking the initiative to object and mobilize in the future. In many situations and contexts, you have an absolute right to file a complaint against a security apparatus or officer that has violated your rights, so try to save as many details as possible from the arrest and the investigation.

After your arrest, investigators will try to withdraw as much information as possible from you, about yourself and the people accompanying you or participating in the action, or the organization you're associated with. You have the right not to give any information awaiting the arrival of a lawyer who can prove and defend your rights, for in most countries, civil and criminal trial procedures allow you to do so.

You can just mention your name and the context of your participation in the action, and hold on to your right to assembly as stipulated in the laws of your country, and your right to defend yourself and to request a phone call with a lawyer and with a family member or anyone else you trust. When asked, you can simply say that the affairs of others do not concern you and that you're only here to speak about yourself, in the presence of a lawyer.

You will likely be exposed to questions of a personal, or at times sexual, nature, in an attempt to embarrass you or discredit you. Being prepared for such toxic behavior means that you have already traveled half the distance. Unfortunately, your arrest period might be prolonged, contrary to legal procedures, and serious charges can be issued to justify the prolonged arrest. Therefore, it would be helpful to prepare yourself for all



possible scenarios and assess your situation before making up your mind about whether to participate in the protest or not, stay there for long or leave early, etc. Remember, your safety is the most important factor here. Should you decide to commit yourself to the longer battle, think deeply through the size and scale of the sacrifice you are willing to offer.

What are the best documentation practices?

Conditions for taking images and video footage from the field vary depending on each country and its laws, as well as on the nature and context of the action. Generally speaking, you have the right to record and photograph what is happening in public spaces without focusing on people's faces, especially children. It is also important to be able to record and take images, not only to serve the purposes of the action and the social collective memory through documentation and archiving, but also to monitor and share recorded violations with relevant stakeholders, including human rights organizations, formal and informal institutions, specialists, lawyers, journalists, and jurists. In Arab countries, it is illegal to film or take images of the faces of the military or security forces, but sometimes, protesters choose to do so for documentation purposes when attacked or witnessing a violation.

“Witness” is an organization that outlines the [best photography practices](#) during protests. Below is a summary of the most significant ones:

- If you use a professional camera, or just a mobile phone to film or take photos, attach the camera or phone to a collar/strap around the neck. If you can't carry the heavy camera running, don't bring it with you.
- Try to use the camera firmly in your hands and avoid overusing Zoom ins and Zoom outs.
- Show yourself for a bit, if you are filming, for the source of the video to be quickly confirmed later; or use a symbolic name for the file you're sharing if you do not want your identity to appear at all. Assess the situation based on your own security and privacy concerns.
- To make it easier for specialists to validate the video, make sure to include important details in your documentation, such as the time (clock) and the place (signs). Show buildings and street names while filming, and turn on the Location and Time feature to facilitate the verification process by the media, the judiciary, researchers, and the public at large.
- Film “Live” when necessary, knowing your connectivity and battery will be greatly affected in this case.
- Try to shoot from both wide and close angles to capture the overall scene

as well as the details. To avoid photographing the faces of protesters, especially in contexts where restrictions prevail, take images from behind, film people's backs, or photograph their feet while marching, for example.

- If you witness an arbitrary arrest case, take a picture or film what's happening (without showing the face, if possible). Describe what is happening with your voice as you witness things, if needed. During chaotic moments, scenes and visuals may be lost and are no longer clear, hence the usefulness of oral narration.
- If you can, take a picture of the police officer aggressing the protester, describe his/her uniform and the badge he/she wears, say his/her name if you know him/her, the violations you are witnessing, and the type of weapon he/she is using.
- Interview participants and eyewitnesses on the ground, but first, please make sure they agree to being featured in a video or media piece and inform them of all publication-related details. Ask them if they have any conditions or requests before using the video (name mention, face show, etc.)
- If the participant in the interview does not want to show her/his face, she/he can wrap it with a scarf, or you can film the, from behind, or film their hands, or adjust the camera "focus" to blur the features.
- Try partnering with another person for filming and photographing purposes. This way you can make sure you have enough backup, different angles, and extra protection.



After leaving or dispersing the protest

The way back

The above or what will follow is not intended to cause you to panic or become fearful, on the contrary. The goal is to encourage you to engage in protests and assemblies while reminding you of tips that may seem complicated at first but will certainly become familiar with time and help you to create a safer and more supportive environment and conditions for yourself and those around you, and to ensure smart and ethical documentation of protests you take part in.

Oftentimes, recommendations and tips shared with protesters end with the closure of the action itself, and overlook the aftermath, that is, when people are no longer together and singling them out or chasing them becomes easier. This is why it's always best to stick to your group and head to your destination with one or more friends, while making sure no one is following you. If the situation is bad and you feel that someone is watching you, try picking up a rock from the floor, or prepare your keys and use them as a small weapon to defend yourself. Most importantly, try to distract those chasing you, to the extent possible, by not going directly to your house or final destination. Enter a restaurant or park or hospital, and make the necessary calls.

Possible reactions: From stalking to cyber-harassment campaigns

Women activists, political actors, journalists, protesters, and human rights defenders face great obstacles and violations while exercising their rights, their professions, and going about their daily lives, especially in extremely undemocratic and violent contexts, like those prevailing in many MENA countries. These women, similarly to other activists, face the risk of arbitrary arrest, abuse, torture, threats against them or their loved ones, as well as their deprivation of basic rights such as the right to decent work, regular pay, the obtainment of official documents, and other vital bureaucratic procedures.

As women, they also remain vulnerable to patriarchal and sexist behavior such as harassment, extortion, rape, and various forms of punishment by male partners or family members who expect women in their circles to seek their permit before participating in any public event or political gathering, guided by the outdated concept of male guardianship.

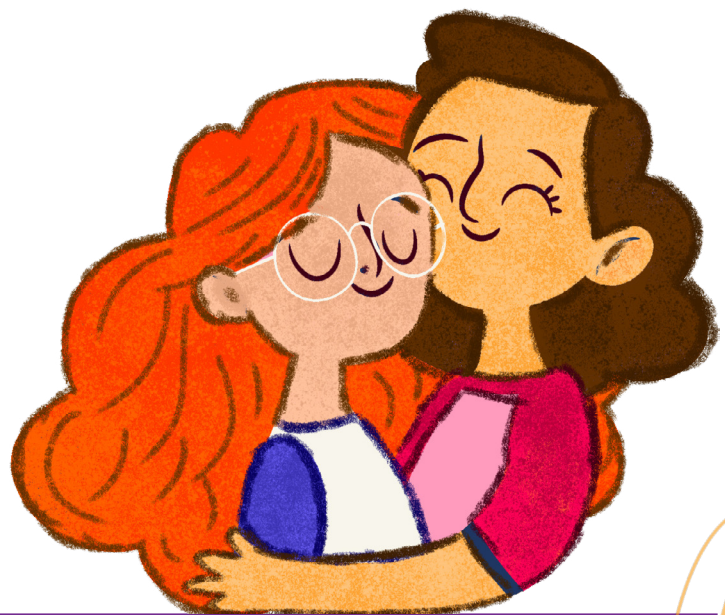
In addition, many women protesters and activists find themselves under different types of attacks, namely defamation and hate campaigns that touch on their personal lives or their private choices in love, sex, and work. Moreover, their intellectual contributions and ideas are often mocked and belittled in a chauvinistic manner.

In this context, every month, organizations concerned with media and intellectual freedoms or with combating violence against women document dozens of cases of women who have been subjected to disinformation or harassment campaigns that aim at silencing them, erasing them from the public sphere, and delegitimizing their struggle and the agendas they put forward. According to a 2022 multi-country [study](#) covering Arab countries by the UN Women, 70% of women activists in the Arab world reported not feeling safe in digital spaces, and 44% of those have indeed been subjected to cyberviolence, more than once. Among the most common forms of digital violence, women surveyed in the study reported harmful practices such as receiving unwanted images or symbols with sexual connotation, inappropriate and unwanted calls, hateful messages, and finally, sextortion threats.

If you often engage in political activity or participate in protests and direct actions, you might become known or targeted, and your face and name could be circulated among those opposing your vision or the ruling authorities, including religious bodies. Therefore, it would be helpful to prepare yourself mentally and emotionally, as harassment and cyberattacks are likely to occur in your case, especially on social media platforms if you are active there, in order to distort your image and discourage you through various means, such as: digging through your past, discrediting your ideas and content, doxxing, spreading falsehoods about your life, and sometimes directly targeting your personal phone with spam messages and malicious links.

Consequently, and as of this moment, consider surrounding yourself with a strong support network made of fellow activists, colleagues, friends, cybersecurity experts and specialists to help you overcome potential ordeals and troubles and not have to take the tough and unfair decision of disappearing from the digital space, public spheres, or the media. In other words, you shouldn't have to do anything that will give your attackers or bullies what they want most, that is to stop you from expressing yourself and keep you away from online and public life.

Finally, the choice is always yours. Whether you choose to ignore a hate campaign you're familiar with or decide to report the case to social media companies or the authorities if the campaign is escalating against you both in tone and intensity, is totally up to you (knowing that perpetrators might be people you know well, or even family members).



In this part of the world, many organizations have been working hard to provide you with guidance and support when it comes to cybersecurity and violence, and can act as a bridge between you and social media companies, such as [SMEX](#).

As you know already, you can always engage with supportive and loving friends and think together about the most appropriate plan for your situation(s). Loneliness will weigh on you, so surround yourself with supportive companions and peers.

Section II

**Additional resources
and
trusted contacts**



Needless to say, legal, political and societal conditions and needs vary largely between countries, and between women themselves, based on a multiplicity of factors ranging from the personal to the familial, economic, political and judicial systems ruling every country, community, or single case. Moreover, activists with a judicial file or open case have different needs and are affected by unsimilar circumstances. Accordingly, one cannot say, “this is the way to support the protesters”, or, “this is the one party specialized in defending them”, in this or that country. However, there are many initiatives and groups in key capitals and cities currently focusing on combating torture and providing legal aid to individuals and protesters whose rights are violated. Some of these initiatives are working to defend freedom of expression and media freedoms, while others are solely advocating for women’s rights and providing social, psychological, and legal support, specifically to survivors of different types of violence, including sexual violence inside and outside the family and violence and harassment at the workplace, at home, in clubs, bars, university campuses, or in the streets...

Hereunder is a table that includes the most relevant groups in the MENA region with extensive experience supporting free thinkers, dissidents, protesters, and women survivors of violence, bearing in mind that some legal or social support groups work with victims, their families or the people who speak on their behalf, in a confidential manner, preferring not to disclose their identity in order to preserve their security and the continuity of their mission



- [The Lawyers Committee for the Defense of Protesters in Lebanon](#), which includes lawyers volunteering to support protesters who get arrested. The team has been in place since 2015.
- [Association for the Defense of the Right to Peaceful Assembly](#) in Lebanon established by HuMENA after the October 2019 uprising.
- Several women’s and feminist organizations provide support to women victims of physical, sexual and psychological violence, such as Kafa (Enough) Violence & Exploitation, Abaad, Women’s Democratic Gathering, FEMALE, and Najdeh organization, among others.



Sexual Harassment Law
(updated with increased sentences in 2021)

- [The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights](#), which has been working since its establishment in 2002 to promote and protect fundamental rights and freedoms in Egypt.
- [El Nadeem Center](#) Against Violence and Torture, founded in 1993.
- [The Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms](#), which has been defending human rights and freedoms in Egypt since 2013.
- [The Egyptian Women's Issues Foundation](#), which was established in 1995 with the aim of supporting Egyptian women.



The Penal Code addresses sexual violence
in some of its provisions

- [The Emergency Lawyers](#) group, which has been providing legal support to protesters, monitoring violations, and challenging emergency laws since 2019.
- [The “No to Persecuting Women” initiative](#), which includes a number of women's associations in Khartoum advocating for women's safety, human rights and their right to participate in public life



Tunisa




The Law to Eliminate Violence against Women (2017)

- [The Tunisian Association of Democratic Women](#), founded in 1989 is a leading feminist organization with a long experience advocating for women's rights and providing direct support.



Marocco



Law on Combating Violence against Women and Expanding the Criminalization of Sexual Harassment (2020)

- [The Free Feminist Union](#) which has been working since 2016 to combat all forms of gender-based violence and provide support to survivors of violence and discrimination.