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Statement submitted by Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The situation of women in Egypt has been in a state of flux over the past five years. For starters, the new Egyptian 2014 constitution granted women various rights, yet, Egyptian women's status still suffer generally from decline in most domains which was underlined by Egyptian Center for Women's Right's annual Women's Status Report, and international reports as the Global Gender Gap report 2014 issued by the World Economic Forum and the Human Development Report 2014 by the United Nations Development Programme.

The 2014 constitution established the right of mothers to pass on their nationality to their children. This constitution grants women a new quota in the municipal councils amounting to 25 per cent, which ensures around 13 thousand female members in the councils. This is a stepping-stone for female representation and paves the way for women to run for the Parliament later on. On the educational attainment, the constitution raised the age of mandatory basic education to secondary education. This in turn reduces child marriage that is widespread for girls in rural areas in general and in Upper Egypt specifically.

The last five years also saw a rise in levels of violence against women in both the public and private spheres, culminating in the systematic sexual harassment of women taking part in celebrations marking the 2011 Revolution and the targeting of female political activists. Egypt also witnessed an attack on women's rights laws after the 2011 Revolution.

Political and Civil Rights

The status of Egyptian women witnessed a significant decline with regard to the political and civil rights during the last two years according to the Global Gender Report 2014 published by the World Economic Forum. This year we witnessed the biggest decline in the level of political empowerment of women; Egypt was in the 134th place among 142 countries in the world in women's political empowerment index, while ranked 128th among 135 countries in 2013, and ranked the 125th in 2012.

Nowadays, it is a critical time for Egyptian women. The parliamentary elections were expected to be held in the beginning of 2015. Yet it was postponed and now scheduled to start on the 17th of October with prospects of a Parliament by the end of the year.

In the previous Egyptian Parliament, elected in 2011, only 8 women were elected, constituting only 2 per cent of the Members of Parliament. According to the new Parliamentary law around 70 seats for women (around 12.5 per cent) will be allocated for women as a result of the efforts of Egyptian women movements.

Freedom of expression has declined during 2014 as Egypt's media outlets adopted almost one agenda that does not allow pluralism or criticism of State institutions. Nevertheless, women have participated in protests, demonstrations and sit-ins. Women have organized and participated in a lot of demonstrations in 2014 for reasons varying from condemning sexual harassment and demanding a law criminalizing it to other political causes such as supporting the army.

With regards to female activists, seven female activists were imprisoned because of their participation in a protest to reject the protest law.

Decision Making and Participation in Amending the Constitution

The last five years have witnessed two Revolutions in Egypt: the first on 25 January 2011 and the second on 30 June 2013. Since then, the Constitution has been amended twice: once in 2011 and again in 2014. However, women were excluded from the process of amending the Constitution on both occasions. In 2011 the proportion of women representatives on the Constituent Assembly, dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, was no more than 7 per cent, and in 2013 their numbers only reached 10 per cent on the Committee of 50, an increase of just 3 per cent and a shocking state of affairs.

The 2012 Constitution made no mention of women, except in Articles 10 and 61. Article 10 pertains to the state guaranteeing services for motherhood and childhood and reconciling the duties of a woman to her family with those of her working life.

The total number of female members on the constitutional committee, which is the committee responsible for the 2014 constitution, is 12 out of 99 members in total. Thus, women constitute approximately 12 per cent of committee members.

The 2014 constitution is considered one of the best constitutions that maintained women's rights in Egypt's history such as article 11.

Article 11 stipulates, "The State is committed to achieve equality between men and women in all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, as per the provisions of the constitution;

The State is committed to take the necessary measures to ensure appropriate representation for women in the Parliament Chambers as specified by law; and shall ensure women's rights to hold public posts, high management posts, and appointment in the judiciary without discrimination;

The State shall be committed to protecting women against all forms of violence, empowering them to reconcile between the duties of a women towards her family and her work requirements;

The State shall also be committed to providing special care and protection to the motherhood and childhood, female breadwinners, the elderly women, and the more needy women."

Yet, the gap remains. 2014 witnessed a significant decline in females in leadership positions such as senior employees and executives. According to the Global Gender Index 2014, Egypt ranked 116th. This represents a significant decline from the previous year 2013 in which Egypt was ranked 101.

In the latest Cabinet reshuffle, only 3 women were appointed amounting to only 8 per cent of the Cabinet. In spite of the importance of women's role in development, the new governors reshuffle will not include women with no explanations or justifications provided.

Economic and Social Rights

The unemployment rate in Egypt is 13.2 per cent according to the latest statistics released by Central Agency for Public Mobilization And Statistics in 2014 on the year 2013. The unemployment rate is 24.2 per cent among women while it is 9.8 per cent among males.

Egypt came in 116th among 142 countries in the world in terms of female literacy. It also ranked 115th for female enrolment in primary education, and 80th in terms of female enrolment in secondary education, according to the Gender Global Gap report 2014.

Violence against Women

Egyptian women still suffer from various forms of gender discrimination, although the new constitution prohibits it. For instance, although article 11 in the 2014 constitution ensures women's right to become judges, Egypt's state council refused to appoint women as judges.

Recommendations

On the political level

- Stress the importance of adopting an electoral system that ensures a representation for women of no less than 30 per cent on both the party lists and for independent candidates in all elected councils.
- Empower women in political parties, which should not be limited to a committee or a secretariat or a post.

On the economic level

- Study and evaluate women's contribution in the economy and in the formal and informal labour market.
- Eliminate discrimination against women in the labour market.
- Empower female breadwinners and enable them through small projects ensuring equality in tax exemptions.
- Provide social services supporting working women such as good nurseries, which protects their reproductive role.

On the educational level

- Modify school curricula to be free from discrimination against women and make sure they stress the value of respecting women.
- Empower women to hold decision-making positions at the level of forming curricula at the Ministry of Education.
- Include a gender-perspective in the curricula stressing good female models who participated in the public domain.
- Include general human rights with a special focus on women's rights in the university curricula.

On the legal level

- Make sure laws are free from all sorts of discrimination against women.
- Amend Family and Personal Status Law to align them with the principles of Justice and Equality of Shari'a, and form the basis for a shared and equal responsibility in marital relations.

- Insure law enforcement in all cases and with all the individuals and groups.
- Increase the penalties for violent crimes in all its forms.
- Reform the Family Court.

On the media level

- Develop a strategy tackling women's issues.
 - Eliminate forms of stereotyping women and draw the attention to the true image of women.
 - Activate the role of the media.
 - Establish a partnership between civil society organizations and the media.
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