

Recommendations by Egyptian Women Organizations
to the 57th Session of the Committee on the Status of Women
New York - March 2013

The Egyptian Women Organizations active in the field of women's rights have carefully considered the first draft of the document to be issued by the Committee on the Status of women on its 57th Session. While they commend the conclusions and recommendations contained in this draft, these organizations note that the draft did not deal with the particular situation of women in Egypt and other countries of the "Arab Spring" in a manner commensurate with the gravity of the situation in those countries that have experienced serious and flagrant human rights violations and a severe setback at the legislative, political, cultural and social levels. If this situation persists and the international community remains silent, it bodes further deterioration in the near future.

In this regard, the Egyptian Women Organizations active in the field of women's rights in Egypt would like to request your august committee to take into consideration some substantive recommendations that are directly related to the current situation in Egypt, as follows:

First: At the constitutional level, a new constitution has been adopted in Egypt. It is the first Egyptian constitution that openly undermines the rights of women. Most seriously, this constitution has dropped an article from the old constitution that reaffirmed Egypt's commitments to human rights, in accordance with all the international instruments it ratified. In legal terms, this means that the legislature and the Egyptian government have abrogated these commitments, with all the ramifications that it entails on human rights in general, and on the rights of women in particular. Therefore, the Egyptian Women Organizations active in the field of women's rights in Egypt request the Committee and all participants in this

session to clearly condemn this action, and to request the Egyptian government and other parties concerned to review this matter immediately and to take the necessary measures to reform the constitution and reaffirm Egypt's obligations under all the international human rights instruments it ratified.

Second: At present, Egypt is experiencing new forms of social and political violence that have afflicted society as a whole, with extremely serious consequences for women, particularly activists in the political and human rights fields. Egyptian Women Organizations believe that the most serious phenomenon is the deliberate and unprecedented targeting of a woman's body on political grounds that became known as "sexual terrorism". The Egyptian Women Organizations would therefore request the Committee and all participants in this session to condemn these criminal acts and to request the Egyptian government to bear its full responsibility for providing adequate protection for women and punishing the perpetrators of such violent crimes.

Third: The experience of the transitional period has proven the State's failure to shoulder its responsibility for providing protection and security for its citizens, particularly women. Instead for providing protection, the State has resorted to an unjustifiable policy of segregating between men and women in public transport and in some public institutions. Thus, the Egyptian Women Organizations believe this policy reflects a strong wish by hard-line, conservative political forces to isolate women in general - a policy that would only lead to further gender-based violence. We stress the necessity for the Egyptian government to shoulder its responsibility to provide protection and security for all without discrimination.

Fourth: Egypt has witnessed a significant decline in the social and economic conditions of the middle class and the poorest segments of the society. Women bear an ever increasing burden due to deteriorating living conditions, lack of protection and the spread of violence, particularly among the poor and marginalized classes, and the consequent grave violations such as trafficking in girls, sexual harassment, rape and other forms of inhuman and degrading treatment. We would therefore call upon the Committee to urge the Egyptian government to assume its responsibility

for the economic and social rights of the poorest and marginalized segments of the society, particularly women and children.

Fifth: The Egyptian civil society has come under increasing pressures and more rigid restrictions in a manner far worse than under the former regime. There are indications that legislative measures are being taken that will impose further restrictions on the civil society and undermine its independence. In this light, the Egyptian Women Organizations stress the necessity for concerted, local and international action to ensure the State's respect for the freedom and independence of civil society organizations, and its responsibility to create a favorable legislative and political environment for them to do their work.

Sixth: The Egyptian Women Organizations are deeply concerned by the international community's passive role regarding the continuing developments in countries of the "Arab Spring", including Egypt, and by the precedence of the interests of major powers over the international community's responsibility for the protection of human rights and the prevention of further violations. We would finally request your important committee and all participating delegations to send a clear message all states and their institutions to play a positive role commensurate with their international commitments, and to refrain from giving precedence to political and economic interests over internationally agreed values and principles of protecting human dignity.

Cairo, Egypt.

The Network of Women's Rights Organizations