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peace for the twenty-first century”

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 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action played an important role in encouraging governments to adopt measures that enhance women's situation, which resulted in significant improvements in many fields including women's political participation, economic empowerment, violence against women, and legislative reform. In this context, Egypt has taken a number of positive steps towards promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, most notably with the establishment of the National Council for Women in 2000, the adoption of the khul' law in 2000 to allow women to divorce their husbands, and the increasing participation of women in public life.

Despite these important steps, Egypt's ranking among the countries of the world in international reports on women's status continues to decline. This poses questions on the adequacy of the taken steps to achieve gender justice and women's empowerment.

Political participation

Egyptian women enjoy constitutional rights as stated in Article 11 of the Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt, which declares equality, political rights, and protection from all forms of discrimination, and ensures the participation of women in the judiciary. The proportion of women in the Egyptian parliament increased from 2 per cent in 2013 to 15 per cent in 2018. In comparison with international standards, Egyptian women's situation in the parliament ranks 138th out of 193 countries around the world in terms of women's representation, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union's website in December 2018. It is worth mentioning that Rwanda places first out of 193 countries with a percentage of 61.3 per cent.

The proportion of women ministers in the Cabinet increased from 6 per cent in 2015 to 25 per cent in 2018. A new constitutional clause (Article 180 of the Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt) reserves 25 per cent of seats in all local councils for women, which historically had low female representation with only 4.4 per cent of local council seats won by women in 2008. A 25 per cent quota for women in parliament was also approved in the constitution amendments referendum of 2019.

However, women still do not hold top positions of judges in official courts. Currently, there are only 66 women judges in ordinary courts, compared to 16,000 male judges and out of a population of 104 million in Egypt, which means female judges account for only 0.5 per cent. Political parties also show little enthusiasm for actively promoting and training female candidates, and most parties do not have targets for women's participation in leadership or as candidates.

Economic empowerment

Egypt has witnessed improvements contributing to women's empowerment economically over the past few decades. This is shown in education indicators that indicate the superiority of females to males. On the other hand, there is a clear gap between men and women in terms of economic opportunities, including ownership of property, access to inheritance, participation in the labour force, employment, and access to finance.

Thus, most indicators that measure gender inequality point to Egypt's low ranking in terms of participation and economic opportunities for women. In this regard, the 2018 Gender Gap Report showed that Egypt places 139th out of 149 countries worldwide in the Women's Economic Opportunity Index. Egypt recorded a

decline in previous years, as reported by the Gender Gap Report; Egypt ranked 135th in 2017 and 132nd in 2016.

In terms of the Labour-force Participation sub-index; Egypt ranks 141st as females' percentage is 24.1 per cent compared to males, which reaches 77.7 per cent. In terms of the wage equality between women and men for similar work sub-index, Egypt ranked 56th, and 139th in the legislators, senior officials, and managers sub-index, where females' percentage is 6.4 per cent compared to males at 93.6 per cent. In terms of the professional and technical workers sub-index, Egypt ranks 113th as the females' percentage is 38.4 per cent and males' percentage is 61.6 per cent. Females working in the informal economy constitute 46.7 per cent of all women, which are usually low-paid and lack protection from any damages.

Despite the amendment of the Civil Service Law in 2016, which granted maternity leave for four months instead of three months, the Constitution has to include specific guarantees to prevent discrimination against women in the workplace, such as not being promoted to top positions due to family obligations. The private sector discourages many women who see a mismatch of responsibilities that are not compatible with the needs of the labour market.

There are also decisions issued under the Labour Code of 2003, which impose restrictions that prevent women from working in certain occupations, such as construction and mining.

There have been positive developments in the proportion of women holding bank accounts, which increased from 9 per cent in 2015 to 27 per cent in 2017, and the proportion of small and medium enterprises dedicated to women increased from 23 per cent in 2015 to 46 per cent in 2018. Microfinance loans for women increased from 45 per cent in 2015 to 69 per cent in 2018, and percentage of female investors in the stock exchange increased by 30 per cent.

However, international reports adopted sub-indicators in which Egypt has not achieved much progress. For example, the 2018 Inclusive Development Index consists of 103 countries and classifies countries according to their economies in two groups: advanced and emerging. In the ranking of emerging economies, Egypt places seventieth out of 74 countries.

Violence against women

Protection of women and girls from violence saw some improvements, as the Penal Code (2014) (Article 306) was amended to criminalize sexual harassment, with imprisonment between six months and five years and a fine of up to £50,000, representing a major step towards women's and girls' safety. However, there have still been many notable incidents of violence against women, as 90 per cent of men and 71 per cent of women consider that wives should tolerate violence to keep the family together. There is also no law on domestic violence and marital rape, and child marriage has yet not been criminalized.

The Penal Code (2016) (Article 242) now punishes the act of female genital mutilation with a period of imprisonment of between 5 and 7 years, and up to 15 years' imprisonment if the act of female genital mutilation leads to the victim's death or a permanent deformity. Yet, the act of female genital mutilation remains common, which necessitates more measures to ensure compliance with the law and better implementation methods.

To receive any incidents of violence against women, there have been improvements in providing 440 gender-based violence-integrated public hospitals and service providers for victims. Units have also been established in 14 public universities and in a number of private universities to combat harassment.

However, the work of non-governmental organizations remains restricted in providing opportunities for women in Egypt, and women's rights activists have been subjected to harassment and arrest.

Honor crimes are also considered as lesser criminal acts and not as murder, as a man who kills his wife for adultery benefits from a reduced penalty.

Urfi (customary) marriages are also not recognized by law, which harm women because they are not registered and the husband can evade responsibilities for wife or child support.

Recommendations

Political participation

- Adopting at least a 35 per cent quota for women in all leadership and decision-making positions
- Offering training for building the capacity of women in all leadership positions
- Amending the Law on Local Administration to be adopted in the electoral system on both individual-seat and list-seat systems to achieve higher representation of women
- Amending the Law of House of Representatives to be adopted in the mixed-member system. Women's proportion should be increased on the list-seat system to 50 per cent
- Amending the Political Parties Law No. 70 by adding an article that obligates the political parties to allocate a 30 percentage for women into all structures

Economic empowerment

- Amending the Labour Law to obligate employers that employ 100 or more workers to provide childcare facilities in the workplace
- Annuling the Decree No. 155 of 2003 that specifies the jobs that women may not work
- Purging the education curricula of all discrimination against women to ensure the image of women is improved and respected

Violence against women

- Adopting mechanisms to support women's access to justice
- Ensuring opportunities for civil society organizations to work better
