

Egypt Pre-UPR Session Statement

Nazra for Feminist Studies

I stand before you today for the fourth review of the Republic of Egypt to address the nation's progress toward advancing women's rights and addressing gender issues. I am here as part of a legacy, representing one generation of Egyptian feminists who have, through history, advocated for women's rights. In the 1920s, Egyptian feminists gathered here in Geneva, calling to end the occupation in Egypt. Today, while the context has evolved, the cause remains the same: a call for rights and freedoms.

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process is a testament to international solidarity, allowing movements and practitioners worldwide to engage in essential advocacy.

In the latest Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Egypt received 372 recommendations and accepted 294, 18% related to advancing women's rights, marking a commitment to uphold and advance these rights.

Over the past five years, Egypt has addressed women's rights and gender equality by adopting the National Strategy for Women's Empowerment and the National Strategy for Human Rights, which include specific measures to fight violence against women.

Launching a National Dialogue established a commitment to human rights, freedoms, and family and societal inclusion. Furthermore, the Egyptian government has recommended implementing Article 53 of the 2014 Constitution by creating a Commission against Discrimination.

Due to constitutional guarantees, women are currently the highest-represented group in Egypt's parliament. Additionally, policies to address sexual harassment have been implemented across ministries and universities. Finally, Egypt has closed 137 cases against civil society organizations and lifted travel bans on numerous human rights defenders, including myself.

However, significant gaps remain. Egypt has yet to address discriminatory laws and procedures in areas such as personal status. The law was passed in 1919 and has only recently seen minor coherent reforms. Litigation related to this law often extends over several years. Although a committee was formed in 2022 to amend the law, no substantial progress has been made. It needs a new philosophy of equality. In the area of Combating Violence Against Women (VAW), there is still no clear legal definition for sexual violence. The current definition of rape is limited to cases involving penetration, excluding other forms such as anal or oral rape, as well as rape involving sharp objects. Domestic violence remains un-criminalized, and there is neither a comprehensive law addressing VAW nor a specific section within the Penal Code that criminalizes violence against women or ensures protections for women in workplaces.

Mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of national strategies have yet to be developed. In recommendation 17 (CEDAW/C/EGY/CO/8-10), the CEDAW committee expressed concern over the lack of transparency and monitoring for national strategies. The development of a second national strategy to address VAW, human trafficking, and early marriage remains unaddressed, with only a few consultations being held with some NGOs.

Moreover, critical actions, such as releasing female detainees, lifting travel bans on Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), unfreezing assets, and ensuring accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence, are still

outstanding. Although many male prisoners were released either by presidential pardon or due to extended pre-trial detention, none of the WHRDs have been freed. Most were extended two years of pre-trial detention, lacking medical services rights. Many other WHRDs acquitted from charges are still under travel bans, or their assets are still frozen. The presidential pardon committee lacks a gender-sensitive approach, leaving many WHRDs still behind bars and lacking rights and freedoms.

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Lastly, a holistic support system for survivors of violence has yet to be established.

To address these pressing issues, we present the following key recommendations:

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1. Fully implement the constitutional provisions by establishing the **Commission against Discrimination and the Commission for Transitional Justice**, as guaranteed by the 2014 Constitution.
2. Review the Penal Code to criminalize violence against women (VAW) and repeal discriminatory laws to align with constitutional protections for women's rights, particularly in Articles 11, 52, 60, 67, 71, 80, and 89.
3. Establish prosecutor's offices to investigate and adjudicate crimes of sexual violence to reduce the length of litigation and expeditiously decide on such sensitive cases.
4. Ensure transparent and engaged gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation committees and adopt holistic approaches aligned with national human rights and empowerment strategies and other strategies managed by the National Council for Women.
5. Release female political prisoners and stop retaliation against political and social actors through travel bans, asset freezes, defamation online campaigns, and others.
6. Urge the Egyptian government to create a specialized committee of pardon through the National Council for Women and the National Council for Human Rights to review the situation of women in prisons.
7. Review and reform laws and policies to make them economically healthier, ensure rights for marginalized groups, and support or expand existing national economic programs such as Takaful and Karama.
8. Ratify International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 190 to enhance protection against violence and harassment of women in workplaces.
9. Create a national framework for the 1325 UN Security Council resolution on women's peace and security.
10. Review the law governing the National Council for Women to align with the Paris Principles, ensure its independence, and guarantee rights to visits to female prisons.

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In this review, we reaffirm our commitment to building on the achievements and challenges in this journey toward gender equity and comprehensive protections for women's rights in Egypt.