

Human Rights Council 28th session

ITEM 6 – UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (UPR) ADOPTION OF EGYPT

20 March 2015 – check against delivery

Mr President, ISHR, APC, AWID and FORUM-ASIA make this statement on behalf of the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition.¹

We express our grave concern that the violence, intimidation and harassment faced by women human rights defenders, which were raised during Egypt's UPR last year, has only intensified. In this regard, we draw the Council's attention to the written statement submitted by Nazra for Feminist Studies (A/HRC/28/NGO/96), which outline specific cases.

In particular, we reiterate recommendations 166.177-166.184, that Egypt ensure full compliance with its international obligations to ensure fair, equitable and independent judicial procedures. The systematic judicial harassment faced by many women human rights defenders is highlighted through the emblematic case of the seven women defenders² arrested on 21 June 2014 for protesting peacefully against the Protest and Public Assembly Law (No. 107), who faced arduous hassles including prolonged pre-trial detention. Their sentence was finally reduced to two years of imprisonment and two years of surveillance by the appeals court in December 2014.

Furthermore, we strongly condemn the killing of Shaimaa ElSabbagh during a peaceful protest on 24 January 2015. She was taking part in a gathering to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the 25 January revolution. We call on the Egyptian government to ensure a prompt, independent and effective investigation to identify the perpetrator and hold them to account. In this connection, we are deeply concerned that Azza Soliman from the Centre for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA), who was witness to the incident and testified before the Prosecutor's Office, is now targeted as a suspect and charges have been brought against her under the public assembly law.

Finally, we express our continued dismay over sexual violence against women in online and offline public spaces. Though a national strategy to combat violence against women has been announced, we emphasise the need for it to be comprehensive and holistic with involvement of all relevant ministries and stakeholders, as well as adequate budget allocation. During the UPR, the government highlighted a new amendment to the Penal Code article 306, which addresses sexual harassment. This amendment is far insufficient in its scope as it only considers sexual harassment a crime if the intent of the perpetrator is proven to be related to obtaining sexual benefits. We call on the Egyptian government to reform the penal code with the view to strengthen protection against violence against women. We urge that women human rights defenders be considered important stakeholders and partners in this process. Thank you, Mr President.

¹ Amnesty International, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), Association for Progressive Communications (APC), Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights, Centre for Reproductive Rights, Centre for Women's Global Leadership, Coalition of African Lesbians, Front Line Defenders, Human Rights First, Information Monitor (INFORM), International Federation for Human Rights, International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia-Pacific (IWRAW-AP), Isis International, ISIS Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange, Just Associates (JASS), The Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights (CLADEM), MADRE, Nazra for Feminist Studies, Peace Brigades International, Rainbow Rights Project Inc, Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLURL), Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights, WOMEN's Initiatives for Gender Justice, Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)

² Ms. Sanaa Seif, Ms. Yara Sallam, Ms. Hanan Mustafa Mohamed, Ms. Salwa Mhriz, Ms. Samar Ibrahim, Ms. Nahid Sherif (known as Nahid Bebo) and Ms. Fikreya Mohamed (known as Rania El-Sheikh)