

Submission in Light of the 20th Anniversary of the Human Rights Defenders (HRD) Declaration (A/RES/53/144) with Focus on Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD) in Egypt

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Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and feminists in Egypt continue to be targeted for their activism and defense of various rights. In light of the 20th anniversary of the human rights defenders declaration (A/RES/53/144), state institutions in Egypt and the media continue to fail to abide by any of the 20 articles of the concerned declaration. This is clearly manifested in various incidents and elements in the ways in which WHRDs are targeted in Egypt on both local and international levels. These manifestations include legal persecution on fabricated charges, some of which are conducted as a form of [reprisals due to engagement with United Nations \(UN\) mechanisms](#), issuance of travel bans, stopping them from travel at airports, blockage of websites and omission of accountability of state actors in national strategies issued by the government on combating violence against women, or those related to the implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 5 on gender equality. Moreover, the issuance of the [new NGO Law \(70 for 2017\)](#) imposes a more restrictive environment for the operation of associations in Egypt, and is not exclusive to those working on human rights. It is also important to clarify that even though the new NGO Law's bylaws, namely Law no. 70 of 2017, have not been issued yet, the law is implemented and its full implementation, according to Amnesty International, completely annihilates civil society in Egypt.

One of these manifestations is Case 173 for 2011, known as the NGO Foreign Funding Case. This case marks the escalation in targeting HRDs and WHRDs since 2014, when [Egypt's Universal Periodic Review was made \(2nd Cycle\)](#), in which human rights and feminist organizations engaged to highlight the violations committed by the government, and [continue](#) to do on a regular manner. In this case, travel bans were issued as a punishment against HRDs and WHRDs, such as that issued against prominent [WHRD and feminist Mozn Hassan](#), Founder and Executive Director of Nazra for Feminist Studies, where the Passport Administration at Cairo International Airport banned her from travelling on the morning of 27 June 2016 during completion of her departure procedures from Cairo to Beirut, and she was informed verbally that the travel ban was issued by the Egyptian General Prosecutor based on the request of the investigative judge. This means that Ms. Hassan has now been banned from traveling for almost two years. Other WHRDs banned from travel include and are not limited to Dr. Aida Seif ElDawla and Dr. Suzanne Fayad from ElNadeem Center, Ms. Azza Soliman, the Head of Board of Trustees for the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA). The concerned measures represent worrying developments, especially that they come in a context of heightened repression of freedom of expression and closure of the public sphere. If Case 173 is referred to court, Mozn Hassan along with other defendants are expected to face charges of: establishing

entities in violation of the NGO law, tax evasion, and receiving foreign funding to harm national security, which according to article 78 (a) of the Egyptian penal code could lead to life imprisonment. Furthermore, it is crucial to highlight that another charge was added to Ms. Hassan, namely that of inciting irresponsible liberation, which insinuates the double standards of the Egyptian state, since it disseminates a discourse of working in favor for the advancement of women's human rights, while it prosecutes feminists such as Ms. Hassan, due to their work on combating violence against women, ensuring that women are actively included in the political sphere and are able to reach decision-making positions. On 11 January 2017 an order was issued to freeze the personal assets of Mozn Hassan, Founder and Executive Director of Nazra for Feminist Studies, those of the company "Nazra for Studies" as well as those of the association "Nazra for Feminist Studies". The asset freeze of the association "Nazra for Feminist Studies" sets a precedent in Case 173 as it is the first association registered under the Ministry of Social Solidarity to have its assets frozen. The personal assets of Ms. Azza Soliman were also frozen on 14 December 2016, and those of her private law firm "Lawyers for Justice and Peace".

The recent crackdown has also affected freedom of press, as Egyptian authorities have blocked over 400 websites on premises of "supporting terrorism" and "spreading lies". The blocked websites have recently included the website "Masreiat", a website made of professional female journalists working to get the voices of Egyptian women heard, and focusing on news related to women's human rights issues.

Additional tactics include preventing WHRDs and activists from traveling without an issued order, where they either have their passports confiscated or are mandated to obtain a security permit to travel, which hinders the course of their activism and defense of rights.

The rest of 2017 has been marked by summons by the investigative judge in Case no. 173 for 2011 of various staff members and partners in civil society organizations, all of whom have been released on bail ranging from 5000 to 20000 EGP. Although Ms. Hassan has not been summoned yet, it is expected that she might be summoned soon, given the increased targeting and escalation in the case.

It is also worth mentioning that on the 26th of August 2017, Mozn Hassan along with other HRDs and WHRDs in the case submitted an appeal to the Administrative Court to cancel the renewal of the investigative judge's mandate in Case 173, as his mandate was renewed consecutively for almost three years now, in violation of article 66 of the criminal procedures code, which clearly stipulates that investigative judges' mandate should not exceed 6 months, subject to renewal once; which means that the investigative judge has been working on the case for more than two years - and continues to do so - without a legal or judicial mandate.

To our knowledge, visits by special rapporteurs (SRs) on freedom of assembly or situation of HRDs have never taken place in Egypt. Yet, good practices include the issuance of reports and [joint statements](#) highlighting the gravity of the situation in Egypt. Additionally, communication with the office of the OHCHR and SR on situation of HRDs are helpful, and the level of responsiveness from the latter is good when urgent appeals are sent on specific cases of WHRDs. What would be more helpful and is direly needed in both the short and long terms, is more public statements by the OHCHR and SRs with relevant mandates, ensuring that the upcoming UPR for Egypt in 2019 stresses the violations that are taking place that clearly show the derelict of recommendations accepted in 2014 to say the least, and calling for a national strategy to be issued, and have its implementation monitored by civil society, on the protection and promotion of HRDs and WHRDs in Egypt in a welcoming and enabling environment, rather than punishing them for their work on advancing the universality of human rights and women's human rights.