

# **2014: The year of un- fulfilled promises for Egyptian Women**

## **Women's Status Report 2014 Summary**

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The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR)'s Women Status Report addresses the developments in Egyptian women's status in a number of areas in 2014. The report is divided to 4 main sections tackling women's status in various public domains. These sections are as the following:

### **Firstly: Civil and Political Rights**

This section tackles women's role in 4 central issues; roadmap, leadership positions, and the upcoming parliament and freedom of expression.

### **Secondly: Economic and Social Rights**

This section examines the most important developments in 4 main areas which are the labour market, health, education and sports.

### **Thirdly: violence against women**

This section tackles violence against women; specifically addressing sexual harassment and the development of the policies to counter it.

### **Fourthly and lastly: Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) efforts**

This section discusses ECWR efforts throughout the year

in its framework of protecting women's rights and promoting women's empowerment.

Women's Status Report starts off with women's gains in the Egyptian constitution of 2014. For starters, the 2014 constitution established the right of mothers to pass on their nationality to their children. This constitution grants women a new quota in the municipal councils amounting to 25 percent, which ensures around 13 thousand female members in the councils. This is a stepping stone for female representation and paves for women to run for the Parliament later on.

On the educational attainment, the constitution raised the age of mandatory basic education to secondary education. This in turns reduces child marriage which is widespread for girls in rural areas in general and in Upper Egypt in specific.

Furthermore, the new constitution criminalized human trafficking in which mostly women and girls were its victims.

Despite these gains, women still suffer generally from decline in most domains which was underlined by the Global Gender Gap report 2014 issued by the World Economic Forum and the Human Development Report 2014 by the United Nations Development Programme.

## Firstly: Civil and Political Rights

The status of Egyptian women witnessed a great decline with regards to civil and political rights in 2014. Egypt ranked 134<sup>th</sup> in the political empowerment sub-index, according to the Global Gender Index 2014, in comparison to 128<sup>th</sup> in 2013 and the 125<sup>th</sup> in 2012.

The chart below illustrates the decline in women political empowerment in Egypt through comparing Egypt's rank in the Global Gender Index in the political empowerment sub-index in the past 3 years, given that the higher the rank is, the greater the decline of women's political empowerment.

### Women and roadmap

- The total number of female members in the constitutional committee, which is the committee responsible for the 2014 constitution, is 12 out of 99 members in total. Thus, women constitute approximately 12% of committee members.
- There was a high turn-out of female voters from different social and economic back-

## grounds in the **constitutional referendum in 2014.**

- The 2014 constitution is considered one of the best constitutions that maintained women's rights in Egypt's history its articles; such as article 11.

### **Women and leadership positions**

2014 witnessed a significant decline in female in leadership positions such as senior employees and executives. According to the Global Gender Index 2014, Egypt came in the 116<sup>th</sup> rank. This represents a significant decline from the previous year 2013 in which Egypt was ranked 101.

The chart below shows Egypt's rank with regards to Egyptian women in leadership position according to the Global Gender Index in the past 2 years:

### **Women in the cabinet**

Although the first speech of Egypt's new President Abdel Fatah Al Sisi stressed on the importance of Egyptian women's role in the executive authority, the new cabinet was a disappointment. Only 4

women were appointed Ministers in the new cabinet out of 34 Ministries, which is less than 12 per cent. In fact, three of these female ministers were already in the cabinet prior to Sisi's inauguration. Only one was newly appointed, who was Dr. Naglaa Al Ahwani, Minister of International Cooperation. This highlights that the inclusion of more competent women was not considered.

The chart below showcases the number of women in the latest cabinet:

### **Women as governor**

In spite of the importance of women's role in development, the Minister of local Development Adel Labib announced in August 2014 that the new governors reshuffle will not include women without providing any explanations or justifications.



## **Women and Egypt's Advisory Council of Experts**

Only one woman was appointed in Egypt's Council of Experts. Egypt's advisory council of experts was launched through a presidential decree in September 2014. Only Dr. Mervat Abu Bakras an expert on pre-university education was appointed out of 16 experts. Thus, women constitute approximately 6% of the Council members.

## **Women and the upcoming Parliament**

While the new parliamentary law stipulates that 56 women should be present on party lists, the political parties have not changed anything in their preparation strategies for the upcoming parliamentary elections.

## **Women and the legislative reform committee**

The Egyptian president Abdel Fatah Al Sisi has issued a presidential decree to form a high committee for legislative reform in June 2014 and this committee had no female members.





## **Women and political parties**

Hala Shukrallah won the Al Dostor party's elections to become the first woman to be **elected** as a head of an Egyptian political party.

## **Women and freedom of expression**

Freedom of expression has declined during 2014 as Egypt's media outlets adopted almost one agenda that does not allow pluralism or criticism of State institutions. This was reflected in the participation in self-expression related activities especially peaceful ones.

Nevertheless, women have participated in protests, demonstrations and sit-ins. Women have organized and partic-

ipated in a lot of demonstrations in 2014 for reasons varying from condemning sexual harassment and demanding a law criminalizing it to for other political causes such as supporting the army.

With regards to female activists, seven female activities were imprisoned because of their participation in a protest to rejecting the protest law.



## **Secondly: Economic and Social Rights**

Egyptian Women encountered a decline in 2014 in access to opportunities and economic participation. As in the Global Gender Gap Report 2014, Egypt came in 131 rank on the economic participation and opportunity sub-index, while with regards to the labour participation, Egypt was

ranked the 136<sup>th</sup>.

The following chart compares Egypt's rank in women's access to opportunities and economic participation in the past three years:

### **Women and labour**

The unemployment rate in Egypt is 13.2 per cent according to the latest statistics released by Central Agency for Public Mobilization And Statistics (CAPMAS) in 2014 on the year 2013. The unemployment rate is 24.2 per cent among women while it is 9.8 per cent among males.

In the light of this significant increase of women's unemployment rate, it is noted that the major projects in Egypt are mostly construction project which are male dominated.

Major General Abu Bakr Al Guindi, the head of the CAPMAS, statements in June 2014 about the division of female and males in the context of the labour force explains the decline of female participation in the labour market. Such statement reflects the lack of political will to enhance female participation, domination of patriar-

chal thought and lack of awareness of the importance of women's role.

Moreover, in 2014, there were discussions on amending the labour law including amendments on the articles on maternity leave, and pregnant women working hours. There were positive comments from the Ministry of Manpower on this issue.

### **Women and health**

There is a relative improvement in the health sector. As indicated in the "Success factors for women and children's health" report, prepared by the World Bank in collaboration with the UNICEF, 10 middle-income and low-income countries, including Egypt, have managed to achieve a great success in reducing maternal and child mortality.

### **Women and Education**

Egyptian women still suffer from lack of educational opportunities. Egypt came in 116<sup>th</sup> rank among 142 countries in the world in terms of female literacy rate. It also ranked the 115<sup>th</sup> with female enrollment in primary education, and 80<sup>th</sup> in terms of female enrollment in secondary education, according to the Gender Global Gap report.

## Women and Sports

- Women's world Squash Championship 2014 was held in Egypt in Cairo's Wadi Degla Club in which the Egyptian Raneem El-Welily was on the verge of becoming the first Egyptian to win the women's World Squash Championship but ended up losing to world number one Nicol David of Malaysia.



- Sara Samir, who started her refereeing career in 2007, refereed a youth match between Wadi Degla Club and Tala'ea El-Gaish Club under 17 year old in Egypt's premier league, becoming the first woman in Egyptian football history to referee a match in Men's league.



## Thirdly: Violence Against Women

Egyptian women still suffer from all forms of sexual harassment; starting with verbal harassment up to rape. In sometime, sexual harassment is employed for political causes; which was affirmed by many studies such as **Working Women Secretariat polls, Study by the research and follow up department of South Egypt Development Association SEDAQ in Qena in southern Egypt, and Amnesty International's report** *“Circles of Hell’ domestic, public and state violence against women in Egypt.”*

- **Gender discrimination**

2014 witnessed many cases of gender discrimination, most significantly:

i. Women and the Judiciary

Although article 11 in the 2014 constitution ensures women's right to become judges, Egypt's state council refused to appoint women as judges. The Council announced last January that women's appointment will be postponed without any explanation, which is actually unconstitutional.

ii. Women as Ma'zoun (Legally authorized marriage officer)

Islam Amer, Head of Ma'azin, translated as legally authorized marriage officers, stated that women's appointment as marriage officers is contrary to Islamic Shari'a.

This is false as a Ma'zoun is an employee that legally records the marriage contract and not a religious clerk. In fact, Amer's statement actually contradicts with article 18 of Ma'azin's bylaws that affirms that nature of their work is not related to religious clerking and article 14 to the constitution.

iii. Women and the Al Nour Party



Al Nour party launched a women's conference in Kafr Al Shiekh governorate to discuss the structure of women committees and the plans to activate its role through a series of meetings between the party leadership and female leaders of the party. Ironically, the platform included only men, how can women's committee be discussed without the participation of women?!

- **Efforts to address sexual harassment and violence against women**

- **On the legal level**

For the first time in June, 2014, Egypt has ratified a law criminalizing sexual harassment as an amendment to the Egyptian legal code, punishing those found guilty of sexual harassment by imprisonment and/ or a fine with stricter penalties with multiple perpetrators, repeated crime and authoritative figures. The law imposes stricter penalties on those who use their authority in settings of family, work or education to commit sexual harassment, will face a jail sentence of two to five years in jail and a fine of LE 20,000 to LE 50,000.

- **On the level of Ministry of Interior**

The Ministry of Interior launched violence against women units in all police departments to provide the necessary protection of women. This is considered a milestone in the policies relating to countering violence against women.

- **On the Cabinet level**

Egypt's Prime Minister Ibrahim Mehleb launched a committee to investigate the causes of the widespread phenomenon of sexual harassment. The committee, chaired by him, includes the Ministers of Tourism, Interior, Local Development, Religious Endowments, Education, Higher Education, Youth and Sports, Health and Population, Social Solidarity, Culture, Justice, representatives of Al-Azhar, and the Church, the National Council for Women and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood.

- **On the level of universities**

Cairo University's President announced on an initiative to counter sexual harassment and violence against women. This initiative includes a high committee to draft policies to counter such epidemics and an executive committee with representative from the civil society.

## **Fourthly: ECWR's Efforts**

In 2014, ECWR worked on several levels:

- A. Legislative reform
- B. Countering violence against women
- C. Women's political participation
- D. Women's economic empowerment

## E. Campaigns to support women's rights



### First: Legislative reform

#### i. Personal status law

ECWR draft a law to amend the current personal status code, after reviewing all the literature with regards to personal status laws, international convention and compare between personal status laws in other Arab countries.

#### ii. Sexual Harassment law

ECWR drafted a law to counter sexual harassment with the help of some legal experts. The center has submitted the draft law to former interim President Adly Mansour as a suggestion for a law to combat this phenomenon.

This draft law employed the philosophy that empha-

sizes the enforced penalty is the most effective or deterrent penalty, not necessarily the maximum penalty.

iii. **Draft law to guarantee women's political participation**

ECWR has submitted a draft to the legislative committee to amend the law on political rights to ensure women's political participation.

## **Second: Countering violence against women**

- ECWR is involved with several projects with the Police research Center; producing research studies on the “*Mechanisms to counter Violence against women; tackling sexual harassment as a case study*” and “*Domestic violence between criminalization and confrontation.*”
- ECWR organized four sessions for officers at Police Academy, Egyptians and non Egyptians, to discuss international conventions on violence against women.

- ECWR as part of civil society is involved in “**My Right project**” in partnership with the Ministry of Justice and the British Council in Egypt. The chairwoman of ECWR, AbolKomsan, is the main consultant on the project. **My Right** project seeks to launch offices that provide psychological and legal support for the victims of violence against women.



- ECWR chairperson, AbolKomsan participated in the meeting with the Ministry of Interior's to discuss the role and effectiveness violence against women unit.



### Third: Women's political participation

- ECWR discussed with the political parties their role in supporting women in the parliamentary and local elections. These discussions resulted in a party charter that aims at enhancing the dynamism of the parties and adopting a clear criterion that parties can abide by to empower women. ECWR has developed a draft of the charter and discussed it with the parties finalizing it.



- In cooperation with other non-governmental organizations, ECWR submitted women's demands from the President before the presidential election. The demands addressed 7

thresholds; political, economic, educational, legal, media, religious and last but not least Egyptians abroad.



- In the framework of women's political empowerment and women's capacity building, ECWR conducted capacity building trainings for 100 women to empower them to join the upcoming Parliament and enhance women's political participation and representation. The trainings focused on several local and field issues to best manage electoral campaigns.



- ECWR designed and published a training manual on the procedures and strategies of electoral campaigns from a gender perspective and how to launch an operation room in its framework to provide technical support for female candidates. This manual targets female candidates for Parliament and Municipal Councils and their campaign managers.



#### Fourth: Women's economic empowerment

- ECWR's chairperson, AbolKomsan participated in the spring and fall 2014 meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to discuss the women's economic status and new strategies including advancing gender equality, driving inclusive growth in the private sector; which facilitated the World Bank's loan to Egypt's Social Development Fund on small and medium enterprises.
- The Center worked on a preliminary report on women and banking on the mechanisms of encouraging women and facilitating their

access to banking services and particularly loans for small and medium enterprises.

This report comes as part of the center's effort to enhance women's economic empowerment through enterprise.

### **Fifth: Campaigns to support women's rights**

- ECWR participated in the organizing the campaign "Mogtama' Arqa", roughly translated as "A better society", in collaboration with the Youth and Sports Ministry and GIZ. The campaign covered several domains which are attitude, illiterate eradication, garbage, and sexual harassment. As part of the campaign, 'Ali Sotek', translated as raise your voice, initiative was launched to raise awareness on the sexual harassment phenomenon.



- ECWR participated with Women’s Coordination for Mass Action, Association for the Development and Enhancement for Women (ADEW), Egyptian Female Lawyers Initiatives, Misr Association for Development and Democratic Progress, and the British Council in the campaign “Barlaman Leena W Leeko”, translated as “Parliament for You and Us”, to support women’s participation in the upcoming parliament.



