

مؤسسة المركز المصري لحقوق المرأة
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Report on the Side Event

"Women's Rights in Egypt: Challenges and Obstacles"



In conjunction with the 48th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) held at the United Nations headquarters in Geneva from January 20 to 31, 2025, during the fourth periodic review in which Egypt is among the countries under discussion, the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) organized a side event on January 27, 2025.

The event aimed to shed light on key issues related to women's rights under the title: "*Women's Rights in Egypt: Challenges and Obstacles.*"



The event featured notable contributions from the panelists, including three Special Rapporteurs on women's issues, as well as three prominent international figures from civil society working in the field of human rights, particularly women's rights. The session was moderated by **Mr. Alaa Shalaby**, *President of the Arab Organization for Human Rights.*

The event was attended by 60 participants, including representatives of UN committees, Special Rapporteurs, state missions in Geneva, members of Egyptian and Arab civil society organizations, and representatives of the Egyptian National Council for Human Rights. The discussions aimed to exchange expertise and explore the latest developments concerning women's rights.

The session began with a speech by **Ms. Reem Alsalem**, *the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls.*



In her remarks, Ms. Alsalem reviewed the progress Egypt has made in combating violence against women and girls, including adopting a national strategy to combat violence, implementing significant legislative reforms to enhance the protection of women and girls from violence, introducing harsher penalties for perpetrators, and improving legal frameworks to support survivors.



However, she noted that persistent challenges remain, such as legal loopholes, cultural issues, weak trust in the legal system, and the social stigma that prevents women from reporting crimes. She also mentioned that during her tenure, 23 communications were sent to the Egyptian government between 2013 and 2024 concerning these issues.

Ms. Alsalem concluded her speech with several recommendations, including:

1. Addressing the excessive use of force and violence, particularly by law enforcement agencies, against women who may participate in protests, express political opinions, or engage in human rights work.
2. Ensuring that women-led organizations and women human rights defenders can carry out their work freely, without harassment, travel bans, or denial of access to justice mechanisms.
3. Refraining from arbitrary detention of women human rights defenders and ensuring their effective access to justice.
4. Improving detention conditions for women in prisons and ensuring access to medical care and humane conditions in accordance with international standards, such as the Mandela Rules and the Bangkok Rules.
5. Repatriating Egyptian women and children from camps in northeastern Syria, especially those believed to have links to ISIS, due to the dire conditions they are living in.
6. Guaranteeing the rights of refugee and asylum-seeking women and protecting them from deportation and gender-based persecution in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
7. Expanding and increasing the frequency of visits by independent experts to Egypt, including the UN mechanism on violence against women and girls, to assess progress, document Egypt's achievements in human rights, and support the government in addressing ongoing challenges.

Ms. Siobhán Mullally, the *Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women*



and children, expressed her concerns regarding the ongoing prevalence of human trafficking in Egypt. In her remarks, she highlighted the continued presence of sexual exploitation and labor exploitation, particularly affecting migrant women workers. She also noted the persistence of child trafficking for purposes of forced labor exploitation. Of particular concern was the continued prevalence of temporary marriages used to exploit women and girls for sexual purposes.

Ms. Mullally called on the Egyptian government and reiterated previous recommendations made during the country visit and by the Human Rights Committee to strengthen the national referral mechanism for victims of trafficking. She emphasized the need to provide unconditional specialized assistance, including psychosocial support, healthcare, legal aid, and adequate resources for accessible, specialized shelters for trafficking victims. She also urged the adoption of comprehensive preventive and protective measures accessible to women and girls with disabilities, as well as all trafficking victims with disabilities.

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She underscored the importance of ensuring effective access to compensation and redress, supported by explicit legal protections for victims, including access to compensation, legal assistance, and remedies. This requires the establishment of a dedicated fund to support the payment of compensation.



In the current context in Egypt, Ms. Mullally referenced her recent participation in the the International Association of Migration and Refugee Law Judges conference and her visit to refugee reception facilities for Sudanese refugees hosted by UNESCO in Cairo. She commended the Egyptian government for hosting a significant number of Sudanese refugees. According to the government, 1.2 million Sudanese refugees have arrived since April 2023, with UNHCR reporting a nearly tenfold increase in registrations, the majority being women and children.

Ms. Mullally noted that the reports presented to the Human Rights Council in 2023, which addressed trafficking in persons and the risks faced by refugees, particularly women and girls in displacement contexts, included steps taken by the government. These steps, supported by the international community and organizations, aimed to ensure timely refugee registration to avoid delays, secure access to safe accommodations, and implement screening measures to address trafficking risks or previous trafficking experiences in Sudan, along migration routes, or in the destination country, Egypt.

In conclusion, she emphasized the need to ensure effective protection and remedies for refugees and trafficking victims, focusing on comprehensive support without discrimination based on gender, disability, race, or ethnicity.

This was followed by remarks from **Ms. Dorothy Estrada-Tanck**, a member of the Working



Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls. Her speech addressed the challenges faced by women and girls in Egypt, including discrimination in laws and practices in various forms, particularly in family-related matters. She also highlighted unequal economic opportunities, unfair political representation, and high rates of domestic violence and gender-based violence. Ms. Estrada-Tanck referenced a statistic from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), revealing that 90% of Egyptian women have been subjected to some form of violence, including female

genital mutilation (FGM), which she described as a clear violation of their health, sexual, and reproductive rights. She further noted that advocates for such rights often face intimidation and violence.

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Her remarks also shed light on the efforts of the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls to promote gender equality. In Egypt, the WGDAGW collaborated with civil society on matters related to asylum law and its impact on the human rights of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees—particularly women seeking protection in Egypt after fleeing their home countries due to severe gender-based discrimination, armed conflict, and human rights abuses.

In its 2019 report on women deprived of liberty, the WGDAGW noted that counterterrorism measures sometimes disproportionately target women, especially human rights defenders. The group recommended integrating women's rights into such measures and avoiding their misuse as tools for repression. It also called on the government to establish clear timelines for transitional periods and ensure respect for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers registered with the UNHCR.

In 2023, the WGDAGW sent a letter to the Egyptian government regarding restrictions on women's freedom of movement based on religious interpretations entrenched in legislation and social practices. These restrictions, the group stated, conflict with international human rights standards, curtail the rights of women and girls, and allow oppressive control by male family members.

In its 2022 report on the activism of young women and girls, the WGDAGW highlighted how stigmatization, harassment, and direct attacks are used to silence women human rights defenders. These individuals face intimidation, sexual assaults, and even death threats. The group also noted that families have historically been a source of discrimination against women and girls, limiting their rights to education, health, work, autonomy, and choice.

Referring to its 2015 report on family and cultural life, the Working Group expressed concerns about economic and legal discrimination within families. It called for eliminating such discrimination, including practices such as child marriage, forced marriage, temporary marriage, and polygamy. Ms. Estrada-Tanck emphasized that the Working Group's ongoing work in 2025 seeks to build upon these ideas, updating the understanding of women's and girls' rights within families under international human rights law.



Ms. Samira Luka, a member of the Platform for Dialogue and Cooperation in the Arab Region and Senior Dialogue Manager at the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS), delivered remarks highlighting the struggles faced by women in Egypt, particularly Christian women seeking legal protection from discrimination, especially in matters of divorce and the right to remarry. Her speech addressed

the ongoing disagreement among the three Christian denominations in Egypt regarding divorce, noting that Christian women cannot obtain a divorce except through the courts, where they are often required to forfeit all their rights. The churches do not approve of this process. Regarding inheritance, Ms. Luka pointed out that there is no specific inheritance law for Christian women, and Islamic Sharia is applied in such cases. She emphasized the lengthy discussions underway to issue a unified law that safeguards their rights.

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In her speech, **Ms. Nehad Abul Komsan**, *ECWR's Chairwoman*, reviewed the status of Egyptian women. While acknowledging the efforts made by the Egyptian government to improve women's rights, she emphasized the need for stronger legislative frameworks and effective enforcement to bridge existing gaps and improve the status of women in society. Key points from her address included:



- *Legislative Reforms*: She stressed the importance of amending existing laws, such as ensuring a minimum 30% representation of women in political party structures, and proposing new laws to combat domestic violence, prevent child marriage, adopt comprehensive family legislation, and enhance legal protections for women subjected to violence.
- *Economic Empowerment*: She called for increasing women's participation in the labor market to 30%, including mandating companies with more than 100 employees to establish childcare facilities and allocating significant funds for women's loans, especially in rural areas. She highlighted the importance of partnerships with civil society to improve awareness and support women's entrepreneurship.
- *Political and Civil Rights*: Despite government initiatives to support women's empowerment, actual implementation has lagged, resulting in a weak global ranking in political empowerment indicators. Recommendations included setting quotas for women in leadership positions and improving training programs to prepare women for high-level roles.
- *Violence Against Women*: She addressed the alarming rise in domestic violence rates, citing statistics that reveal a significant proportion of women face physical or psychological abuse. ECWR called for better mechanisms and measures to support victims and protect those reporting such cases.

At the end of the session, the floor was opened for attendees to ask questions.

It is noteworthy that ECWR not only participated in this event but also submitted a shadow report as part of stakeholder submissions. This report monitored the status of Egyptian women over the past four years across several levels, including legislative reform, violence against women, political and civil rights, and economic and social rights.

To access the report within stakeholder submissions, click the following link:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/eg-stakeholders-info-s48>

To watch the full side event, please click the link below:

https://www.facebook.com/Nehad.Aboul.Komsan/videos/606807512079671?locale=ar_AR