Statement to UN Human Rights Council 43rd session (24 February - 20 March 2020)

Item 6: Universal Periodic Review

Statement on Egypt

Violence against women and girls
WILPF welcomes Egypt’s acceptance of several recommendations to end all forms of violence against women and girls, and to investigate and prosecute cases of sexual violence and harassment.¹ Supporting such recommendations must be translated into serious and concrete actions;² it should not be mere lip service. In 2017, Cairo was the world’s most dangerous city for women due to sexual harassment and violence, without effective measures to deter these violations.³ Legal loopholes often counter the efforts made to end different forms of violence against women and girls and obstruct effective implementation. For example, although sexual harassment has been defined as a crime in the Egyptian Penal Code, its articles 306 bis (a) and bis (b) still provide the need to prove prior sexual intention to harassment, something that is difficult to prove for claimants; thus, this requirement can be a way out for defendants.⁴ Moreover, societal culture also continues to blame women for sexual harassment, with claims that harassed women wear “indecent” attire or display “reprehensible” behaviours on the street.⁵ Therefore, we recommend that Egypt amend all discriminatory laws and provisions against women, including in the Penal Code, in order to ensure women’s equal access to justice and equality before the law and eliminate all forms of violence against them.

Women Human Rights Defenders
The targeting of human rights defenders, including of women human rights defenders, is systematic in Egypt. The 19 recommendations on the protection of human rights defenders made to Egypt in this UPR cycle are a clear indicator of the gravity of the situation.⁶ Repressive measures against human rights defenders continue; they include travel bans imposed as “precautionary measures” without prior information, withholding of passports at the airport; freezing of accounts without investigation or proper legal procedures for notification. Activists, including prominent women human rights defenders Azza Soliman and Muzn Hassan, have been prosecuted as a result of the politically motivated court case known as ‘Case 173’ of 2011. The National Strategy on Violence against Women also fails to refer to women human rights defenders and to their protection.

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² WILPF, CEWLA and Al-Nadim joint submission, October 2019, pp.3-4, available at: https://www.wilpf.org/portfolio-items/joint-submission-to-the-upr-working-group/
⁵ WILPF, CEWLA and Al-Nadim joint submission, October 2019, pages 3 – 4, available at: https://www.wilpf.org/portfolio-items/joint-submission-to-the-upr-working-group/
⁶ A/HRC/43/16, recommendation 31.126 (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) 31.130 (Netherlands), 31.163 (Iceland), 31.178 (Argentina), 31.194 (Italy), 31.195 (Fiji), 31.196 (Ghana), 31.197 (Liechtenstein), 31.198 (Luxembourg), 31.199 (Mongolia), 31.200 (Republic of Korea), 31.201 (Sweden), 31.202 (Afghanistan), 31.203 (Belgium), 31.204 (Canada), 31.205 (Denmark), 31.206 (Ecuador), 31.207 (Finland); 31.208 (Germany), available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/EIndex.aspx
WILPF regrets that Egypt only partially accepted recommendation 31.175 to end Case No. 173/2011, foreign funding investigations, travel bans, and asset freezes against civil society\(^7\) and that Egypt considers as factually incorrect recommendation 31.130, which calls for the release all persons detained for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, online and offline, association and assembly and to close case 173/2011 against Egyptian NGOs and human rights defenders, in line with international human rights obligations.\(^8\)

We urge Egypt to immediately cease ongoing harassment, including defamation campaigns and threats, of human rights defenders and to cease all aforementioned “precautionary measures” against human rights defenders. Given that Egypt committed to supporting a free and active civil society by partially accepting recommendation 31.175, it must therefore ensure a safe working environment for human rights defenders, giving attention to the specific needs of women human rights defenders and women organisations.

\(^7\) A/HRC/43/16, recommendation 31.175 (United States of America), available at: [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/EGindex.aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/EGindex.aspx)

\(^8\) A/HRC/43/16, recommendation 31.130 (Netherlands), available at: [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/EGindex.aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/EGindex.aspx)