



General Assembly

Distr.: General
4 September 2013

English only

Human Rights Council

Twenty-fourth session

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2013]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Human rights violations against women in Egypt

The events that led to the deposition of former president Mohamed Morsi were characterized by severe human rights violations against women who took part in the demonstrations in opposition to the rule of deposed president Morsi. During the demonstrations that started on 28 June 2013- 7 July 2013, 186 cases of sexual assault of varying intensity, ranging from sexual assault to rape were documented. Nazra for Feminist Studies, as well as intervention groups against sexual violence, including Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment and Tahrir Bodyguards, documented 12 cases of violent sexual assault and rape in the vicinity of the Square on June 28, 46 cases on June 30, 17 cases on July 1, 26 cases on July 2, 80 cases on July 3 and the early hours of July 4, and 5 cases on July 7.

The official response of former president Morsi's governments aimed at using the sexual assaults to achieve political gains. A statement, written in English, was issued on Facebook, by the official page of Essam Al-Haddad, then Assistant to the President on Foreign Relations and International Cooperation on Saturday June 29th, in which Al-Haddad holds a comparison between the demonstrations supporting Mohammed Morsi in Rabia al-Adawiya district and the demonstrations opposing Morsi in Tahrir Square. Al-Haddad claimed that the Rabia al-Adawiya demonstrations are "significantly larger" than its counterpart in Tahrir, singling out the sexual assault of a non-Egyptian survivor (while ignoring the case of Egyptian survivors) to draw a clear line between the two demonstrations and to conclude that the assaults indicate that the "crowds in Tahrir are out of control". In the same context, the account of Ikhwan Web on Twitter, the official account of the Muslim Brotherhood, to which deposed President Morsi belonged, tweeted that Tahrir "thugs aka 'revolutionaries' have sexually assaulted a foreign woman".

With the deposition of Mohamed Morsi by Colonel General Abdul Fattah el-Sissi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces and the Minister of Defense, interim president Adly Mansour issued a decree that provides, among other things, for the creation of a Ministry of Transitional Justice and National Reconciliation, a positive indicator regarding the concern of the government with regards to this issue. However, up to now, the mechanisms to be adopted by the Ministry have not been elucidated.

It is difficult to envision a transition to democracy and the respect for human rights in the backdrop of the extremely bloody violence engulfing the country. Even though presidential adviser Mostafa Hegazy stressed the necessity of transitional justice as the only way towards stability upon his appointment, he justified the deaths that took place on 14 August 2013, in the backdrop of the dispersal of two sit-ins staged by pro-Morsi demonstrators in Al-Nahda Square, in Giza; and Rabia Al-Adawiya through the claim that Egypt is engaged in a war "against terrorism". 1311 deaths occurred on 14 August, 869 in Rabia Al-Adawiya, 94 in Al-Nahda Square, and the remaining 348 occurring in the acts of violence that spread across Egypt.

In the violence that erupted following the dispersal of the sit-in, Coptic Christians were particularly targeted, along with churches, seemingly as a punishment for their assumed opposition of deposed president Morsi. A total of 38 churches have been burned, and 23 churches attacked and partially damaged throughout the country, according to Amnesty International. Although there is no clear evidence indicating that the Muslim Brotherhood are responsible for the sectarian violence, hate speech against Coptic Christians was widely used during the pro-Morsi sit-ins. According to the official Facebook page of the Freedom and Justice Party, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, "Based on the actions of Pope Tawadros and Christians in Egypt, they deserve these attacks on churches and their institutions. For every action, [there is] a reaction." Although the prime minister condemned the sectarian clashes on 15 August, such is not a sufficient response. Given the sectarian

language that has been used by Morsi supporters during the sit-ins, churches and property belonging to Coptic Christians should have been sufficiently secured, as such attacks were no surprise.

Accordingly, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) and Nazra for Feminist Studies would like to make the following recommendations to the Egyptian government and the international community:

- Call on the Egyptian authorities to investigate the tragic death toll that accompanied the dispersal of the Rabia Al-Adawiya and Al-Nahda sit-ins and hold those responsible to account. The latter step can serve as a practical implementation of the current government's emphasis on transitional justice and the establishment of a regime that breaks with the past, specifically with the practice of using excessive force against protesters;
 - Call on the Egyptian authorities to train law enforcement officials on international human rights standards relating to the maintenance of the security of peaceful assemblies, contained in the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. Such trainings would enable law enforcement officials on the dispersal of sit-ins without resulting in the loss of lives. The trainings would also enable law enforcement officials to intervene during demonstrations to avert the trend of sexual assault and rape that women human rights defenders, and women who happen to be present in the context of demonstrations, have persistently faced since 25 January 2012;
 - Call on the Egyptian authorities to provide protection for Coptic Christians, who are targeted with violence and hold those responsible for the killing of Coptic Christians and the destruction of their property to account. Special attention should be awarded by the Egyptian authorities to Coptic Christian women, as women become especially vulnerable during periods of societal violence which exacerbate existing gender inequality. In Beni Suef governorate, for example, a mob attacked and burned down a Franciscan school and paraded its nuns on the streets like "prisoners of war". Two other women working at the school were sexually harassed as they tried to escape the mob, details of the attack published in the official **State Information Service** website.
 - Call on the international community to push the Egyptian authorities to initiate a process that genuinely aims towards breaking with the past. Such a process can commence by holding to account those responsible for the killing of pro-Morsi demonstrators and the sectarian violence, during which women become especially vulnerable. It is by holding to account those currently in power that the Egyptian government can truly prove that it is genuinely interested in breaking with the past.
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