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Written statement* submitted by the Nazra for Feminist 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.

[13 February 2017]

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

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Escalation in Targeting of Women Human Rights Defenders in Egypt and Closing Space for Civil Society

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and feminists in Egypt are targeted for their activism and defense of various rights. While some continue their imprisonment for charges connected with breach of the infamous Protest and Public Assembly Law (No. 107 of the Year 2013), others face *Travel Bans*, *Asset Freeze Orders* and *Arrest Warrants* on the background of case no.173 for 2011 known as the NGO Foreign Funding Case.

Tactics to punish WHRDs and HRDs have included the issuance of travel bans, 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 had been issued by the Egyptian General Prosecutor based on the request of the investigative judge. Mozn Hassan was traveling to attend and participate in the Executive Committee meeting for the Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD) Regional Coalition for the Middle East and North Africa, as a Regional Expert for the coalition, taking place during the period 27 June to 1 July 2016. Travel bans have also included Esraa Abdel Fattah on 13 January 2015 (Case No. 25465 of 69 Judicial Year), which has been confirmed by an administrative court on 16 June 2015, and a petition to cancel the travel ban was rejected by court on 7 December 2015. Mohamed Zaree, the Egypt Office Director of CIHRS, Hoda Abdel Wahab, the Executive Director of the Arab Center for Independence of the Judiciary and Legal Profession, as well as the Executive Director of the Centre for Women's Legal Counseling, and Nasser Amin, HRD and Director of the Arab Centre for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession in Egypt and a member of the National Council for Human Rights, Investigative journalist Hossam Bahgat, HRD Gamal Eid, the Executive Director of the Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI). Recently, travel bans have also included Ahmed Ragheb Executive Director of the Egyptian Community for Human Rights and Law, Psychiatrist Dr. Aida Seif El-Dawla, Director of ElNadeem Center for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture, as well as Azza Soliman, Lawyer, Founder and Head of Board of Trustees of the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA). 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 last travel ban issued is that against Lawyer and HRD Negad El-Borai, the Executive Director of United Group of Lawyers on 26 January 2017.

Moreover, an orchestrated escalation in the attack on civil society organizations has been taking place recently. After the issuance of asset freeze orders against Gamal Eid, Hossam Bahgat, and HRD Bahey El-Din Hassan, Founder and Executive Director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), Ahmed Samih, the Executive Director of Andalus institute for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies, Abdel Hafiz Tayel, who is the Executive Director of the Institute for the Right to Education and Mostafa Al-Hassan, the Director of Hesham Mubarak Law Center, more WHRDs and HRDs have had their assets frozen. On 14 December 2016, an asset freeze has been issued against Azza Soliman and her law firm "Lawyers for Justice and Peace", then on 11 January 2017 an order has been issued to freeze the personal assets of Mozn Hassan, those of the company "Nazra for Studies" as well as those of the association "Nazra for Feminist Studies", which sets a precedent in the asset freeze of the registered NGO under the Ministry of Social Solidarity.

The recent developments in case no.173 for the year 2011 indicate a worrying escalation against feminists in the case and a criminalization of their work. The asset freeze order issued against "Nazra for Feminist Studies" is an unprecedented one in the case, and in the history of civil organizations working on women's human rights, as it is the first time the assets of a registered NGO under law 84 for the year 2002 and under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Solidarity are frozen. Moreover, previous to the asset freeze order, an arrest warrant was issued against Azza Soliman based on a request by the investigative judge, where a police force took Soliman from her house, and she was released on bail amounting to EGP 20,000 after hours of investigation.

Furthermore, an important case is that of "Belady Foundation" (case 4252/2014/felonies) which includes Aya Hegazy and Amira Farag, who have been in detention for 33 months, which dates back to the raid conducted on the premises of

the foundation on 1 May 2014. This case is an example of the clampdown on civil society organizations. They have been in pre-trial detention for more than 2 years, which is against the Egyptian constitution and penal code, and even though Amira Farag was released recently, Aya Hegazy continues to be detained.

The 4th Anniversary of Mohamed Mahmoud Clashes is another case where on the on the 27th of January 2016, the Abdeen Misdemeanor Court confirmed the verdict of WHRD Gameela Ahmed Sareyy-ElDin and 4 activists of two years in prison without bail for protesting without a permit, illegal assembly, obstructing traffic and disrupting public peace. Recently, a presidential pardon was granted for all those convicted in the case except for Sareyy-El-Din, who continues to serve her sentence.

In addition, a lifetime imprisonment verdict and a fine of 17 Million Egyptian Pounds (USD 2,229,215.84) was issued on February 4, 2015 in the case known as the Ministerial Cabinet Case (Case No. 8629 for the Year 2011) by the Sayeda Zeinab Felonies Court. The case includes 3 WHRDs who are still detained since March 3, 2015, namely Shaimaa Ahmed Saad, Marwa ElSayed Seif Eldin, and Abeer Saeed Mohamed Mostafa. They are currently at Qanater Women's Prison. The next court hearing for the case is on the 14th of March 2017.

Sexual violence against women in the public space continues to remain a grave problem. A national strategy to combat violence against women has been announced and published on May 7, 2015, yet, after more than one year of its publishing, we emphasize the importance of monitoring its implementation. Moreover, the lack of the differentiation between state and non-state actors in the concerned strategy, in addition to the lack of differentiation between violence against women in the private sphere and public one is one of the main issues that need to be addressed in the concerned strategy, in addition to not regarding marital rape as a form of violence against women, no reference to accountability of both state and non-state actors is made, and no provisions are outlined for revising the internal regulations of shelters. With the exception of the Tahrir mob-sexual assaults and gang rapes in June 2014 during the inauguration of President Abdel Fattah ElSisi, no one has been held accountable for mob-sexual assaults and gang rapes committed since November 2012, and only a few individual cases of sexual harassment and sexual assault have had perpetrators held accountable. Teachers are also subject to crimes of sexual violence, where incidents of sexual assault, rape and mob-sexual assaults have been documented by the media, including the rape of a teacher by a microbus driver and a friend of his on a desolate road in El'Amriya city, in addition to a teacher in a school in Giza governorate who was subjected to a mob-sexual assault by students whom she refused that they cheat on an exam. Teachers continue to suffer from sexual violence amid the lack of provision of safety measures for them, whether in places where they teach, or in transportation routes. Finally, during the Journalists' Syndicate sit-in in May 2016, women journalists and WHRDs were physically and sexually assaulted by non-state actors outside the syndicate, with no intervention from security forces present.

Subsequently, Nazra for Feminist Studies urges the United Nations to monitor states' implementation of the WHRD resolution adopted in 2013, as well as Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations with regards to women's human rights in Egypt, to ensure protection of women and WHRDs. We also urge the United Nations to call on Egyptian authorities to close case 173, and the persecution of HRDs and WHRDs, as without their empowerment, human rights would be jeopardized and violations would not be exposed.