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peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Several obstacles that hinder women's participation in the economy and prevent them from obtaining bank loans in Egypt. Although there are no legal restrictions on women obtaining credit loans, they are not popular among women, as there are no incentives for them to utilize them. On the other hand, women prefer to obtain credit loans from civil associations, believing it to be easier and faster compared to banks. Women's participation in the economy is not only a means to empower and achieve self-fulfilment, but it is also a fundamental element in economic development and poverty reduction.

Egypt recently witnessed legislative developments aimed at reducing violence against women in all its forms. This is evident in the issuance of numerous laws and decisions at all levels. However, this has not prevented the spread of violence and the reduction of discriminatory practices against women. This is evidenced by the legal consultations received by the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights annually, totalling 30,000 requests for legal assistance and support. Consultations related to domestic and household violence come first, indicating the continued suffering of women from it in its harshest forms. Sexual harassment in physical reality or in the online space ranks second among the crimes women face. In addition to online violence, which poses a major challenge, girls and women are subjected to various forms of violence, threats, and blackmail. This necessitates taking deterrent legal measures to enforce the law, especially in light of societal customs and traditions that primarily blame the victim and hold the victim responsible for being subjected to crimes, especially victims of sexual assaults.

According to a study released by the National Center for Social and Criminal Research in collaboration with the National Council for Women in January 2022, it indicated that 75 per cent of women and girls in Egyptian society are subjected to violence. The study also highlighted that violence directed towards women by their spouses comes at the top of the list of domestic violence. The study also indicated that 80 per cent of the sample under study were exposed to sexual harassment in the street. The study pointed out the role of the official authorities concerned with supporting and assisting victims of violence and the extent of their effectiveness, as the study revealed that the hosting centers 'women shelters' in their current state are merely places that provide shelter and basic needs for women victims of violence in a short period of time. These shelter centers face various financial, administrative, and cultural challenges within the Egyptian society context, along with a lack of coordination and collaboration.

This places a double obligation on law enforcement agencies. However, the actual reality of the spread of violent crimes against women and girls confirms that there is a missing link between the issuance of laws and the high rates of these incidents that women are exposed to, which indicates the necessity of speedy and fair enforcement mechanisms. As cases that remain in the courts for long periods are another form of violence against women. Additionally, it's crucial to have protective measures not only for victims but also for informants and witnesses.

The economic empowerment of girls and women constitutes one of the most important pillars of getting out of violence, so the inheritance law was amended with the aim of the legislator's intervention to criminalize the intentional refusal to hand over the inheritance property or its proceeds or withholding inheritance entitlement documents to the heir, whatever its type.

These are crimes against women are common practice in many Upper Egypt, and rural governorates refrain from handing over inheritances to women, especially in cases where the inheritance is land. Until now, the costly and long duration of

litigation procedures still represent a major obstacle to women's access to justice and their financial entitlements. Additionally, the State remains silent about violations women suffer that place them in financial destitution and unable to escape the cycle of violence. Despite the existence of the law, it is not effectively enforced.

On another note, the law on "Penalties for Evading Spousal Maintenance" poses a significant challenge for many divorced women, despite its existence. However, Article 293 of the Penal Code was amended under Law No. 6 of 2020 to address those evading spousal maintenance or refusing to pay debts related to expenses. The aim of this amendment was to protect families and secure sources of livelihood and a dignified life, as well as to facilitate the fulfilment of Bank Nasser's obligations. Nevertheless, women face struggles to prove spousal maintenance evasion, requiring legal procedures that can take up to a whole year, not to mention the fees incurred by women to take these actions. While filing maintenance claims is not associated with fees, other procedures to prove the husband's refusal to provide maintenance require financial costs, time, and effort, which in turn endangers the lives of children and mothers by exposing them to the risk of hunger. Up to this moment, the state has not taken alternative measures to disburse amounts that would rescue women and their children who are victims of spousal maintenance evasion, in order to expedite the process in such cases. Thus, it becomes evident that implementation mechanisms are a significant barrier to enforcing laws for the protection of women.

Furthermore, Egypt has been experiencing a significant deterioration in living standards, especially since last year, after the Egyptian currency lost a substantial percentage of its value against the US dollar due to financial corruption, administrative mismanagement, and the absence of robust development plans, resorting to imports instead of seeking self-sufficiency, and the misuse of available resources. Additionally, the prices of energy and food have risen due to Russia's war on Ukraine.

According to the "World of Work" report issued by the International Labour Organization in May 2023, it warned that escalating debt levels due to high inflation rates and interest rates, among other exacerbating crises, have reduced opportunities for employment in developing countries. The report found that low-income countries struggling with debt crises are the most affected, with more than one in four people who want to work unable to find employment. As for the poverty rate in Egypt, according to the latest report from the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, it stood at 29.7 per cent for the period from 2019 to 2020. Education levels are strongly correlated with poverty risks, as poverty rates decrease as education levels rise. For instance, 35.6 per cent of illiterates are considered poor, compared to 9.4 per cent of university graduates in 2019–2020. The figures for those with higher-than-average education levels are 15.2 per cent for certificate holders, 17.4 per cent for high school graduates, and 33.1 per cent for those with basic education certificates in 2020 and 2019.

In the Gender Gap Report for the year 2023, Egypt ranked 119 out of 146 countries in the Educational Attainment Index. In the sub-index for literacy rate, it ranked 122. The female enrolment rate in higher education was 42.49 per cent, while for males it was also 42.49 per cent. However, there is a significant gender gap in the unemployment rate. According to data from the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, the unemployment rate in Egypt was 7.1 per cent during the first quarter of 2023 (from January to March). The male unemployment rate was 4.5 per cent, while the female unemployment rate was 19.2 per cent.

From the aforementioned statistics, it is evident that this represents a waste of intellect and resources, intentionally impoverishing women and leaving them in a state of severe deprivation. The prevalence of customs, traditions, and cultural

emphasis on the reproductive role of women and domestic service contribute to the escalation of violence against women.

In order to achieve this, the State should eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, especially violence in all its forms, as stated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Article 2 (c), which states: “States Parties condemn all forms of discrimination against women and agree to pursue, by all appropriate means and without delay, a policy of eliminating discrimination against women. To this end, they undertake: (c) To establish legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men and to ensure, through national courts and other public institutions, the effective protection of women against any discriminatory action.

Based on the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in its Article 4, which states: “States should condemn violence against women and should not invoke any custom, tradition, or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination. They should adopt, implement and monitor policies and measures aimed at eradicating such violence...

We recommend the following to the State:

- Adopt policies that accelerate gender equality and empower women to access their rights, especially financial rights.
- Observe the implementation of laws to facilitate women’s access to public services, especially justice.
- Take measures to overcome the causes of poverty and deliberate impoverishment of women (for example, laws regarding inheritance and spousal maintenance).
