

Ensure women's rights are integrated in post-revolution Egypt

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Egypt: Ensure women's rights are integrated in post-revolution Egypt

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Women of Egypt played a prominent role in the revolution of early 2011. They were essential organizers, leaders and spokespersons during all phases of the revolution and demonstrated in large numbers in the streets. They were also beaten and some even sacrificed their lives during the protests. However, post-revolution events, such as fundamentalists calling for sex segregation in public transportation and for women to be veiled, have made women's rights activists anxious that women may be sidelined. "Women are now shocked and worried about what the post-revolution days have in store for us. It seems likely that we may even lose the rights we had before the revolution," says Ms. Sulieman, a women's rights activist. Fatema Khafagy of the Alliance for Arab Women says, "Moving forward, the government of Egypt at all levels must include women and uphold their rights in all aspects of their lives."

TAKE ACTION NOW!

Already, women have been excluded from the drafting of the constitutional declaration, which was adopted by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces on 30 March 2011 and will guide the nation through a transitional period until a new constitution is drafted and approved. Some provisions of the constitutional declaration suggest that women may continue to be excluded from participating in the public sphere. For example, article 26 stipulates that, "Egypt's president is born to two Egyptian parents and cannot be married to a non-Egyptian woman." Although it does not specifically prohibit women from serving as president, this amendment appears to aim to limit the presidency to men only. Despite this discouraging language, one woman has already declared her candidacy for the upcoming presidential election.

Women have also been excluded from the new government led by Prime Minister Issam Sharaf such that out of 26 ministers only one is a woman. In addition, it is unclear how many seats will be designated for women in the September 2011 election for the new Parliament, which consists of the People's Assembly (the lower house) and the Shura Council (the upper house). Article 38 of the constitutional declaration only stipulates that, "The law regulates the right of candidacy to the People's Assembly and Shura Council in accordance with any electoral system which may be determined that includes a minimum of participation of women in both houses" without defining the minimum participation. In 2009, the People's Assembly approved a quota of approximately 14% of the seats in the People's Assembly being designated for women. The Shura Council currently does not have a quota for women. Previously women's representation in both houses, the People's Assembly and the Shura Council, was historically very low - less than 2% and 7% respectively.

In June 2011, the Alliance for Arab Women held a meeting with over 3,000 Egyptian women which produced the Egyptian Women's Charter. The Charter, signed by 500,000 groups and individuals, was forwarded to the Prime Minister of Egypt on 5 June by Michele Bachelet, the executive director of UN Women. This Charter is a comprehensive list of demands to ensure that women's rights and concerns are integrated in all post-revolution frameworks and institutions. Key demands of the Charter include:

- Women to be represented in the committee that will be entrusted with drafting the new constitution, in all legislative committees, and in all dialogue forums that discuss national issues.
- Women to occupy at least 40% of the ministerial positions and 30% of parliamentary electoral lists to comprise of women.
- The new constitution to spell out clearly full equality between men and women in all spheres of life.
- Women to have equal opportunities in accessing the labor markets, credit, capital and skills training and protection from any kind of sexual harassment in the workplace.
- All discriminatory legislation against women to be reviewed and revised and in particular Family Law to be reformed to reflect human dignity and justice for all members of the family.
- Women graduates of law schools to have equal opportunities to acquire judiciary posts.
- Establishment of a strong national women's machinery along with other mechanisms such as gender focal points in all ministries and governorates; a gender equality committee inside the parliament; and an Ombudsperson for gender equality to ensure gender mainstreaming in all policies, plans and programs of the government and of the legislative and judiciary systems.
- A national policy to be formulated to reflect a positive image of women and to help create a culture with no discrimination against women.

The Egyptian Constitution states that, "All citizens are equal before the law. They have equal public rights and duties without discrimination due to sex...." Egypt is also a party to a number of international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) all of which call for equality between men and women.

In its concluding observations following its meeting with the Egyptian government in February 2010, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, tasked with monitoring implementation of CEDAW, called upon Egypt "to adopt temporary special measures...in order to accelerate the full and equal participation of women in the various phases of the electoral process"; "to modify, or repeal, without delay and within a clear time frame, discriminatory legislation" and "to adopt effective measures in the formal labour market to eliminate both horizontal and vertical occupational segregation, narrow and close the wage gap between women and men and apply the principle of equal remuneration and equal opportunities at work..."

Currently, parliamentary elections are scheduled for September 2011, followed by the presidential election in November.

Recommended Actions:

Please write to the Egyptian authorities urging them to take steps to meet the demands laid out in the Women's Charter. Call upon them to ensure that 30% of electoral lists are comprised of women so that women have the opportunity to participate in the political life of the country. The new government should, among other things, ensure that women are represented on the constitutional committee; that at least 40% of ministerial posts go to women; that discriminatory legislation is reviewed and revised; that women have equal access to the same employment and business opportunities as men; and that a strong women's machinery is established. Remind the authorities that they should live up to Egypt's obligations under CEDAW, the ICCPR and the ICESCR.

TAKE ACTION NOW!

Letters should go to:

Prime Minister Mr. Issam Sharaf, Magless El Shaàb Street, Al Kasr El Einy, Cairo, EGYPT /
Phone: +202-2793-5000, Fax: +202-2795-8048, Email: pm cabinet.gov.eg

With a copy to:

Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, 11 Al'ourubah Street, Cairo, EGYPT / Fax: +202-241-83761, E-mail: amd mmc.gov.eg (note: some emails have not been going through to this address; online signatures will be collected and faxed.)

Letters:

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to express support for the demands of Egyptian women to integrate women and their rights in all post-revolution institutions and policy frameworks as laid out in the Egyptian Women's Charter that has been signed by over 500,000 people and submitted to you by Michele Bachelet, the Executive Director of UN Women.

Egyptian women worked side-by-side with men in the revolution and deserve to be recognized as full and equal citizens post-revolution. This would be in line with the Egyptian constitution and Egypt's international obligations, including under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The Women's Charter lays out concrete steps towards gender equality. As laid out in the Charter, I urge you to ensure that:

- Women are represented in the committee that will be entrusted with drafting the new constitution, in all legislative committees, and in all dialogue forums that discuss national issues;
- Women occupy at least 40% of the ministerial positions and 30% of parliamentary electoral lists are comprised of women;
- The new constitution clearly spells out full equality between men and women in all spheres of life;
- Women are provided equal opportunities in accessing the labor markets, credit, capital and skills training and protection from any kind of sexual harassment in the workplace;
- All discriminatory legislation against women is reviewed and revised and in particular Family Law is reformed to reflect human dignity and justice for all members of the family;

- Women graduates of law schools are provided equal opportunities to acquire judiciary posts;
- A strong national women's machinery is established along with gender focal points in all ministries and governorates; a gender equality committee is established inside the parliament; and an Ombudsperson for gender equality is appointed to ensure gender mainstreaming in all policies, plans and programs of the government; and
- A national policy is formulated to reflect a positive image of women and to help create a culture with no discrimination against women.

Such steps will ensure that Egyptian women and men have a brighter future based on self-determination, mutual respect and dignity

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

cc: Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, Supreme Council of the Armed Forces
Fax: +202 241 83761

P.S.

* From Equality Now:

http://equalitynow.org.rste057vlmp01.blackmesh.com/take_action/discrimination_in_law_action381