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مركز القاهرة لدراسات حقوق الإنسان



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Agenda item 4**

## **Human rights violations against women in Egypt**

The events that led to the removal of former president Mohamed Morsi were characterized by severe human rights violations against women who took part in the demonstrations in opposition to Morsi's rule. During the demonstrations from 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 the following cases of sexual assault and rape in the vicinity of Tahrir Square:

- 12 cases 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
- 5 cases on July 7

The official response of former president Morsi's government aimed at using the sexual assaults to achieve political gains. A statement, written in English, was issued on Saturday, June 29th on the official Facebook page of Essam Al-Haddad, then Assistant to the President on Foreign Relations and International Cooperation, in which Al-Haddad compared the demonstrations supporting Mohammed Morsi in the Rabia al-Adawiya district and the demonstrations opposing Morsi in Tahrir Square, claiming that the Rabia al-Adawiya demonstration was "significantly larger" than its counterpart in Tahrir and singling out the sexual assault of a non-Egyptian survivor of sexual harassment (while ignoring the cases of Egyptian survivors) to draw a clear line between the two demonstrations and to support his conclusion that the "crowds in Tahrir are out of control". In the same context, the Twitter account of Ikhwan Web,

the official page 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 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 respect for human rights against 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 context of the dispersal of two sit-ins staged by pro-Morsi demonstrators in Al-Nahda Square in Giza and in Rabia Al-Adawiya Square in Nasr City by claiming 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 due to acts of violence across Egypt.

In the violence that erupted following the dispersal of the sit-ins, Coptic Christians and their churches were particularly targeted, seemingly as a punishment for their assumed opposition of deposed president Morsi. A total of 38 churches have been burned and 23 attacked and partially damaged throughout the country, according to Amnesty International. Although there is no clear evidence indicating that the Muslim Brotherhood is 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, this was 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 and Nazra for Feminist Studies present the following recommendations:

1. We 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 to 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.

2. We urge the Egyptian authorities to train law enforcement officials on international human rights standards relating to maintaining security during peaceful assemblies, as per 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 to disperse sit-ins without incurring loss of life and to intervene during demonstrations to put an end to the pattern of sexual assault and rape faced by women human rights defenders, as well as other women who happen to be present in the context of demonstrations, since 25 January 2012.

3. We call on the Egyptian authorities to provide protection to Coptic Christians, who are targeted with violence, and to 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 inequalities. 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 are available on the official State Information Service website).

4. We urge the international community to push the Egyptian authorities to initiate a process that aims to make a genuine break with the past. Such a process should begin by holding to account those responsible for the killing of pro-Morsi demonstrators and for the recent sectarian violence, during which women have become especially vulnerable.