



**CAIRO INSTITUTE
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES**
Institut du Caire pour les études des droits de l'homme
مركز القاهرة لدراسات حقوق الإنسان

**United Nations Human Rights Council: 26th Session
Item 3: General Debate, Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
19 June, 2014
Delivered by: Sohair Riad**

Thank you, Mr President,

CIHRS welcomes the report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression on the realization of the right to freedom of opinion and expression in electoral contexts. As stated in the report, the free flow of ideas is a core requirement for the promotion of democratic spaces, and thus freedom of opinion and expression is one core necessary component of free and fair electoral processes.

Recent experience in the Middle East and North Africa, where there have been and will be elections in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Algeria, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen, has driven home the point that the success of democratic processes is not only about the casting of ballots on election day but is first and foremost about the context surrounding the elections. Censorship, intimidation, and attacks against journalists; societal and governmental discrimination and restrictions on the work of human rights NGOs; and political violence and the use of economic power by certain groups to gain political influence remain core systemic barriers that hinder free, transparent, and fair electoral processes. The lack of plurality and transparency witnessed in some of these electoral processes has demonstrated clearly that the mere holding of elections should not be equated with a meaningful democratic process.

Rather, a true democratic process is only possible where core rights provisions are respected – where individuals have access both to their core civil and political rights, such as the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, so as to be able to make their voices and positions heard, and where they have access to their core social and economic rights, such that they are empowered to participate with some degree of equality in the democratic process. Instead, the experience of the region has unfortunately highlighted a tendency by governments to utilize elections to create the appearance of a democratic process, while stripping that democracy of its substance by continuing to crack down on human rights.

We thank Special Rapporteur La Rue for his insightful report and important recommendations concerning regulations to protect freedom of expression in the context of election processes. In this regard we note that the key watch-dog role that civil society actors, including human rights NGOs, often play within electoral processes needs to be clearly promoted and protected on the national level for genuine democratic processes to occur.

Thank you, Mr. President