

ECWR UPDATE

**A monthly update of ECWR's activities
and the status of women in Egypt**



Dear Friends,

ECWR wishes to extend our praise to the National Council for Women for drafting a new law against sexual harassment. The law follows 2 1/2 years of awareness, research and advocacy work on this issue by

ECWR and our many volunteers. We will be holding a roundtable very soon to discuss with the NCW and legal experts our comments and suggestions for strengthening the law even more. ECWR's legal recommendations and analysis are available by contacting us at ecwr@link.net.

Meanwhile, we held 2 press conferences on harassment – one releasing our study results and the other discussing the importance of reducing street harassment to Egypt's economy, in particular the tourism industry. Our radio PSAs have also begun to air on Youth and Sport and Banat wee Bas radio stations, and Horeyatna online radio (PSAs and study available at www.ecwronline.org).

Our civil education and community mobilization projects remain on hold while we recover from the extensive delays caused by the Ministry of Social Affairs and our partner, the EIDHR.

ECWR summer volunteer interns have produced a number of Issue Briefs for media, researchers and policy-makers on topics relevant to women's rights in Egypt (rape, sexual harassment, human trafficking, employment, political participation, nationality, etc.). These will soon be available in English and Arabic on our website or from ECWR by email.

We thank all of our volunteers for their hard work and expertise.

Many thanks,

N. Abul Komsan
Nehad Abul Komsan
Chair

NGOs Successfully Block Egypt from Obtaining the UN Human Rights Council Presidency

An NGO coalition blocked Egypt's bid for President of the UN HRC based on Egypt's terrible human rights record, which is much worse than the successful candidate, Nigeria. The following is from Ted Piccone's article from the Washington Post (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/04/AR2008070402281.html>).

"Six months ago, it seemed inevitable that Egypt would take over the presidency of the Human Rights Council, the United Nations' main forum for monitoring state behavior on human rights. Africa's turn at the rotating presidency was coming up, and no country had expressed any willingness to stand against Egypt, the Africa group chair. Last week, however, it was Nigeria, not Egypt, that was elected to the presidency, marking a major victory for human rights organizations in Africa and around the world. Nigeria is far from perfect as a council president, but it is certainly better than Egypt."

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The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights

ECWR is an independent non-governmental organization dedicated to improving women's status in Egypt and the Arab region.

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Human Trafficking: Profile of a Growing Problem

"Trafficking in persons" is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Human trafficking is the 3rd most lucrative form of international crime after arms and drugs trafficking. Trafficking occurs within and across national borders. Discrimination against women like domestic violence, being limited to low paying jobs, and having little decision-making power in marriage and childbearing can increase women's vulnerability to trafficking. The consequences of trafficking include violations of human rights; social, psychological and health costs; decreasing levels of human capital; disintegration of the social fabric; spread of disease; and the promotion of crime and corruption.

Common forms of trafficking in Egypt

- **Temporary marriage:** In temporary marriage, women are sexually exploited either within Egypt or abroad, often by tourists from Gulf States. Women who "consent" to temporary marriage often come from rural areas and/or families with limited economic means and promised a good life with a wealthy husband, but often face abuse and sexual exploitation. Egyptian marriage requires the woman's consent, but some are coerced, leaving no law to protect them. Falsification of documents enables marriage brokers to sell underage girls into marriages amounting to sexual servitude.
- **Child labor and prostitution:** Children in Egypt are often recruited from poor families and trafficked internally for commercial sex work, agricultural work and domestic servitude. They face restrictions on movement, non-payment of wages, threats, and physical and sexual abuse. Egypt has anywhere from 200,000-1 million "street children," many of which have been trafficked into begging and other work. CARITAS estimates that 80% of street children are victims of sexual exploitation and rape. Less attention has been paid to child agricultural or domestic laborers.
- **Trafficking of Women Through Egypt:** Most anti-trafficking efforts of Egypt's government have focused on its role as a transit country for women from former Eastern bloc states being trafficked through Egypt to work in the commercial sex industry in Israel. Routes through the Sinai Desert used to traffic drugs and weapons are also used to traffic people. Currently Egypt does not provide services for identified trafficking victims who are foreign nationals, and has engaged in violence against trafficking victims/refugees on the borders.

Laws on Trafficking

Egypt has no comprehensive anti-trafficking law, but in 2007 it established a consultative National Coordinating Committee to Combat & Prevent Trafficking in Persons, and Suzanne Mubarak established an "End Trafficking Now Campaign."

International laws: Egypt has ratified or acceded to several international treaties related to trafficking which mandate national legislation, including the Palermo Protocol, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Egyptian laws that can be applied to trafficking:

- **Laws against forced labor:** Article 13 of the Egyptian Constitution
- **Child Law:** Article 99 of the Labor Law of 2003; An amendment to Egypt's Child Protection law, article 7; Article 96 of the Child Law.
- **Laws against Prostitution:** The Egyptian Prostitution Law, Law No. 10
- **Laws against early or temporary marriage:** There is no law in Egypt against "temporary marriage," and a wife cannot refuse divorce from her husband. Courts may choose not to hear cases where women have not attained the minimum marriage age, or where the claim of marriage is disputed and there is no official documentation. The law does not recognize marital rape, and domestic labor is in an expected "duty" of the wife.

Recent Developments on Human Trafficking in the Middle East

Several countries in the region have recently passed legislation to combat trafficking, including United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, and Bahrain. In 2006, UAE passed Federal Law 51, one of the first pieces of anti-trafficking legislation in the Middle East. The Four Pillar Action Plan includes legislation, victim services, enforcement, and international cooperation. Both Qatar and Bahrain have also established National Plans to combat trafficking and National Coordinating Committees.

Next steps for Egypt

- 1) **Research:** One major barrier to eliminating trafficking in Egypt is lack of knowledge about the extent of the problem. Statistics are unavailable and difficult to obtain due to the sensitive nature of the issue.
- 2) **Awareness-raising:** For media and civil society, law enforcement and immigration officials on how to identify and treat victims of trafficking.
- 3) **Comprehensive Anti-trafficking Legislation**

The information on this page was taken from ECWR's new series of Issue Briefs on topics concerning women's rights in Egypt. Prepared by volunteer researchers and law students at ECWR, they are aimed at clarifying key issues confronting women specifically for journalists and others interested in learning about these topics quickly.

Contact ecwr@link.net for more information



Sexual Harassment's Impact on Egypt's Economy: Report from ECWR's August 19th Seminar

ECWR Chair, Nehad Abul Komsan summarized the results of our recent study, "Clouds in Egypt's Sky," on the recent phenomenon of sexual harassment in Egyptian society. ECWR published 2 studies on sexual harassment: the first gathered basic information about the problem from approximately 3,500 respondents, and the second was more targeted and based on a sample of 1010 Egyptian men, 1010 Egyptian women and 109 foreign women.

We discovered that contrary to popular belief, veiled women and woman who wear a full face veil also experience harassment. Over 60% of the men sampled said they harassed women. The main problem is verbal harassment, and most men consider it non-offensive, not realizing it is a crime. The study also asked why men harass. The men in the sample blamed women for wearing unacceptable clothes (despite the fact that over 70% of the harassed women were veiled). Of the Arab and non-Arab foreign women who came to Egypt to learn and study, 7% said they would not return to Egypt because of harassment; some said that they might return, but only after a long time. One researcher cancelled her Master's program because she could not bear the amount of harassment. Despite this, Egypt's image is not completely ruined yet, so we can do something now.

Mohsen Rady, MP, said that this phenomenon is horrible and scary, and leads to various other crimes. He outlined reasons why he thinks sexual harassment happens: absence of rule of law, lack of concern in society for harassment, people's silence when harassment occurs instead of reporting it to the police, and the political, economic, and social situation in the country. Furthermore, he believes there is an absence of morals, which explains why veiled women are harassed. He suggested that we should study the marginalization of women and its role in sexual harassment, so that the image of women in society can be corrected, and amend the Penal Code to include the term 'sexual harassment.'

Dr. Hamdy Abdel Azem, Professor of Political and Economic Sciences and Former Head of the Sadat Academy, stated that sexual harassment is a moral problem and abnormal behavior. He suggested that reasons for sexual harassment could be unemployment, but harassment occurs at all economic levels, not just among the poor. There is a common belief that only poor men harass because marriage is very expensive, but men of all income levels harass to appear popular with women. Increased use of drugs and alcohol may also be a factor since there is a correlation between drugs and corruption.

Dr. Abdel Azem outlined the many negative impacts of sexual harassment. There are negative impacts on tourism, whether of Egyptian women or foreign women. 86% of foreign women in the sample stated they had been harassed and 83% of the Egyptian women sampled had been harassed. Furthermore, the harassment took place in crowded, public places. Sexual harassment creates a lot of stress that decreases the productivity of female workers. The negative experience of foreign women leads to them refusing to come again or cutting their vacations short, negatively impacting national income.

He then compared Egypt to Dubai. In Egypt, policemen on the streets do not pay attention if they see harassment occurring. However, in Dubai, policemen actively discourage harassment and if they see a man harass a woman, they will send the man to jail. He urged society to encourage each person to take personal responsibility for the problem of sexual harassment, and work to improve the problem.

Send us your graphic responses!



"You Can't Stop Them, but You Can Protect Yourself"



"A Veil to Protect or Eyes Will Molest"

These rapidly spreading conservative responses to the growing movement against sexual harassment blame women for harassment for not wearing a veil. This ignores our large Christian minority, promotes wearing the veil for wrong reasons, objectifies women, portrays men as mindless insects, contradicts statistics showing that women who wear a veil, even the full face veil, experience high levels of harassment, and contradicts religion's call for respect and personal responsibility for all.

ECWR has the information to fight these harmful messages, but we don't have graphic designers. If you have ideas for designs that can use the correct information about harassment or religion to counter these dangerous images, please send them to us at ecwr@link.net.



Discrimination Against Women in Sports: Myth or Fact?

This month, 26 Egyptian female athletes walked in the opening ceremonies at Beijing, among the largest contingency of any Arab country. Female athletes from approximately 12 other North African and Middle Eastern countries also walked in the opening ceremonies; UAE, Bahrain and Libya all had female flag bearers. Women's interest in athletics is present in the region, but they often face barriers to participation.

Most Western discussions of Arab women and sports focus on dress: how Islamic dress codes limit the number and types of athletic opportunities for women. But to Egyptian women, dress has not been the primary barrier. Not all Muslim women choose to wear hijab, and Egyptian Christians make up around 15% of the population. Many examples exist of women who competed internationally regardless of dress, including Grania Adwany, an Egyptian swimmer, and Hassiba Boulmerka, Algerian gold medalist in the 1500 meter track at the Barcelona Olympics. Since 2002, the Islamic Women Games (also known as the Solidarity Games) have been held in Iran. At the Games, women can participate in all events in normal dress, with no photography or men allowed in the venues.

A more serious barrier than dress is access to facilities. Sports federations provide fewer facilities for women, and even fewer have gender-segregated facilities. Some sports clubs set women-only times, but these are very limited and not enough for professional-level training. Often, women have to leave the country to train, like the Algerian volleyball team that trains and plays in France.

Social expectations are another barrier. Women are expected to help in the household, limiting the time they have for outside activities like sports. They are also expected to marry and raise families, leaving even less time to for athletics. The decision to participate may not even be in her hands, but from a male family member or influenced by her family's views on the social acceptability of sports, especially when it comes to demands that are counter to tradition, like staying overnight outside the home to participate in a sporting event.

The final barrier is economic. In Egypt, most sports are practiced in clubs, which can be expensive, limiting sports participation to middle- and upper-class women who can afford the entry fees, and the cost of travel to events and competitions.

The low level of participation in sports, while an issue of freedom of choice and gender equality, also has other disadvantages for women. Sports achievement is taken into consideration in university entry in Egypt. Participation on teams and in competitions gives students an additional two percentage points from high school to university entry, so participation in sports can affect educational opportunities.

Despite all these challenges, Egypt has had a national women's football team since 1997. The organizer, Sahar El Hawarri, has faced criticism from conservative religious groups, which claim that playing football will ruin a woman's virginity (a commonly held misconception is that virginity is defined by the presence of the hymen, a fold of membrane around the vaginal opening, rather than being related to sexual intercourse). In addition, she has faced problems of recruitment and funding. Despite the difficulties, however, the team has continued for ten years.

NGO Coalition Versus Egypt in the UN HRC, Continued...

"Egypt's human rights record is cause for serious international concern. Its autocratic government has engaged in torture and persecuted political dissidents and religious minorities. Its actions at the UN have also been harmful. Egypt has led efforts to prevent action on human rights crises, such as Sudan and Zimbabwe, attempted to silence nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Geneva, and hamstrung the council's independent experts. An Egyptian presidency of the Human Rights Council would have cast a dark cloud over an already troubled body, consigning serious human rights issues to the United Nations' backburner for at least the next year.

When African NGOs learned that Egypt was likely to run unopposed for the Council's presidency, they took action. Forty-two organizations in twenty countries wrote to all of the African heads of state, demanding that Africa be "represented in this role by a recognized human rights leader from our continent." Given Egypt's effective diplomacy at the United Nations, it was never likely that this NGO coalition would achieve much. But through a sophisticated advocacy campaign in democratic and democratizing countries, the NGOs convinced their governments not to support a potentially embarrassing and regressive African presidency."

This represents promising signs for NGO engagement in international human and women's rights mechanisms. One of ECWR's major priorities is to increase our involvement in such mechanisms and help other local rights groups to increase their knowledge and capabilities to do the same.

Quote from Ted Piccone's article from the Washington Post
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/07/04/AR2008070402281.html>