

**Human Rights Council
Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review
20th Session**

Review of the Arab Republic of Egypt

Introductory Statement

Delivered by:

**H.E. Counselor Ibrahim el-Heneidi
Minister of Transitional Justice and House of Representatives**

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Mr. President,

Distinguished heads and members of delegations

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the pleasure of be among you today at the head of my delegation throughout the interactive dialogue on the 2nd Universal Periodic Review of Egypt .. Egypt the cradle of civilisation and culture .. having its roots reaching to the depths of the history of mankind and at the base of enlightenment.

I have come to you from the new Egypt that is full of hope and determination to ensure a better future for its people .. the Egyptian people who have drawn up since January 2011 a human saga with the search for human dignity and rights as ultimate hero. The will of the Egyptian people has laid the foundations for a new state based on citizenship, equality, and democracy .. that respects the rule of law, and adheres to the rules of good governance.

At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation for the contribution of the Universal Periodic Review mechanism to the efforts aimed at the respect and protection of human rights and freedoms. I have recognised – throughout the preparation process for Egypt’s second review – the positive contribution and constructive role of this mechanism. The preparation process has provided a further opportunity for communication with national and public forces and civil society. This in itself has contributed to the creation of a wide space for listening interaction and eventually resulted in true development of the concepts and understandings surrounding the human rights situation in Egypt.

It is obvious to all that since the first review of Egypt in 2010 the country has witnessed major unconventional political and social circumstances. In the past three years, Egypt passed through two major popular revolutions that have transformed the political landscape. The driving force behind those revolutions is

the protection of the rights of the Egyptian citizen and guaranteeing his/her freedoms. In this light, the demands of the Egyptian people have crossed the ceiling of the recommendations Egypt received and accepted during its 1st Review. They have surpassed the cosmetic reforms undertaken from time to time by the defunct regime.

On 25 January 2011, Egypt witnessed a popular peaceful revolt against a ruling authority that has led the country to an atmosphere of corruption and political and social marginalisation. As a consequence, Egyptians revolted and ousted the regime. They elected a new president in 2012 and assigned him to translate the will and the objectives of the people. They demanded freedoms, social justice, and a true democracy. Instead, this new president adopted a series of exclusionary policies, and authoritarian practices that violated the rule of law and the rights of Egyptians. His practices paved the way for a unilateral control of power by one political faction .. his political faction. In addition, the president and his supporters disseminated hate speech and incitement to violence.

The Egyptian people recognized the demolition of the rule of law, and the wasting of the fundamental rights they fought to attain. As a result, they sprang up for another revolution on 30 June 2013, with the participation of about 30 million Egyptians, ousting the regime after only one year in power. They rectified the path of their original revolution. Political and popular forces agreed on a national map for the future to rebuild constitutional institutions and lay the foundations for a true democratic system. This political roadmap encompassed constitutional reform, and presidential and parliamentary elections. The Committee of the Fifty was formed comprising representatives of Egyptians from all walks of life. The Committee drafted a new amended constitution that has gained popular support, demonstrated in the high percent of voter turnout, including unprecedented participation by women. The new constitution was passed by a 98,1 % yes vote, followed by presidential elections in May 2014, appointing a new President by a popular vote of over 96 %. Preparations are also underway for holding parliamentary elections, the final step in the declared roadmap.

Mr. President,

The human rights and freedoms of citizens came at the top of the priorities of the national government, which administered the political roadmap since the June 30 revolution. My presence amongst you today, as Minister of Transitional Justice and House of Representatives, stands as proof. The Government of Egypt established following 30 June this new portfolio out of an understanding of the underlying causes of the revolution and a realisation of the malfunctioning of the social and political life in Egypt.

The ministry is responsible for all aspects relevant to human rights in Egypt. It observes types of violations and marginalisation for many social segments and works on ensuring accountability and reparations to victims of violations. The ministry is also tasked with formulating the legislative agenda of the government based on a vision for institutional reform and human rights. In short, the establishment of this ministry is indicative of the establishment of the foundations of a new state that adheres to the principles of good governance and adopts the philosophy of full social participation.

In upholding the principle of accountability, the Egyptian President formed in 2013 an independent fact finding commission to investigate the acts of violence following the 30th of June revolution, headed by an international judge of high standing, who served on the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. I would like to inform you today that the commission has finalised its work and submitted at the end of last week its report to the competent authorities for action.

As further proof on the prioritisation of human rights at the core of the Egyptian political awareness, the elected President is keen to always emphasize the full respect for human rights. Among the first of his decisions was the formation of a high committee for legislative reform tasked with a full review of the legislative edifice in order to align it with the new constitution. The ministry of transitional justice is tasked with the administration of this committee. The Committee has already prepared a number of draft laws addressing the core human rights issues; a non-exhaustive list includes the draft law on transitional justice that complies with international standards, with guarantees for truth and accountability, the draft law on the Equality and Non-Discrimination Commission, and the draft law to regularise the construction and restoration of churches. In addition, a draft law is being prepared to address genocide and crimes against humanity.

I would like to highlight here that the 2014 Constitution represents in itself a true victory for human rights and freedoms. It reflects a commitment and clear direction toward respect for human rights. Article 5 of the Constitution listed human rights among the foundations of the State political system. It stipulates that discrimination and incitement to hatred as crimes with no statute of limitations. It further committed the state to achieve social justice. According to the Constitution, citizenship, equality and equal opportunity form the basis of the relationship between the individual and the State.

It has stipulated rights and freedoms unprecedented in previous Egyptian constitutional systems, and included several guarantees for their preservation. It stipulates that dignity is a right to every human being, and that torture is a crime

not subject to a statute of limitation. For the first time, it ensures the right to peaceful strike, and unleashed the freedom of belief. Personal freedom is ensured as a natural right, as well as the freedoms of movement, thought, opinion, artistic and literary creativity, press, and publishing. The Constitution prohibits forced arbitrary displacement. It ensures the rights to form political parties, and the formation of civil associations and organisations upon notification. They are not to be dissolved except by a court order.

The State is obligated by the Constitution to allocate a percent from Gross National Product to health, education, and scientific research. The Constitution further dedicates several articles to address the rights of women, children, persons with disabilities, older persons, and expatriates.

Despite the critical historical phase Egypt is passing through, it is still a State based on institutions that respects and fulfils its international obligations. These include the implementation of the recommendations it accepted in 2010.

Allow me now to present the most important steps undertaken toward implementation of those recommendations.

- a number of inter-agency governmental consultations have been held with civil society representatives to hear their views on the human rights situation in Egypt, including on achievements and challenges.
- The Government of Egypt issued a number of decisions and laws since 2011 during the transitional period in order to implement its international legal obligations in the field of human rights. The most important of those include: tightening punishments for crimes of violence against women, establishing the right to exchange of information, regulating the right to vote by Egyptians abroad, addressing integrated development of Sinai, establishing a health insurance system for women breadwinners (female heads of families), and children under the school-age, and prohibiting the conflict of interests of government officials, and regulating the right to public assembly, processions, and peaceful demonstrations.

Mr. President,

Egypt received in 2010 a total number of 165 recommendations. It accepted 119, and 25 were under implementation at the time of the review. Despite the pressing domestic issues, steps have been taken to implement the accepted recommendations as follows:

First: In the field of civil and political rights

- National legislation fully respects Egypt's international legal obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Accordingly, the law regulating political parties was amended in 2011 to allow for the establishment of political parties upon notification. The committee responsible for examining notifications has a full judicial composition. Political parties are not to be dissolved except upon a court order. Those regulations led to an upsurge in the number of registered political parties in Egypt to up to 96 parties. The referenda and elections held since 2011 have been characterised with integrity, impartiality, and transparency.
- In the field of promoting dialogue between religions, the Al-Azhar and the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt launched the "the House of the Egyptian Family" initiative with a view to reinforce the values and principles of citizenship for all. In its turn, the Family House launched, in cooperation with civil society partners, a campaign to restore and repair 46 churches affected by the acts of violence following the June 30 Revolution.
- The freedom of and opinion and expression, the press, and publishing has lately witnessed a wide leap. The Egyptian Constitution and laws do not impose any limitations on the access of bloggers and the public to the internet. Presidents of national newspapers are appointed upon nominations from newspapers themselves. In the latest ministerial cabinet, the ministry of information has been abolished. In its stead, steps are underway for establishing a Council for Media Regulation in accordance with the Constitution.
- Since 2011, the Government of Egypt has been involved in a review of Law no. 84 for 2002 regulating civil associations and non-governmental organizations in Egypt. Consultations aim at reaching a draft law supportive of the participation of NGOs in addressing various developmental concerns, promoting civil action and the role of civil society organisations, in particular those active in the area of human rights and fundamental freedoms. I would like to emphasize here that the total number of registered NGOs at the ministry of social solidarity reaches around 47 thousand organizations, in comparison to 26 thousand in 2010.
- In addressing the issue of torture, the Egyptian Constitution stipulates that "torture in all forms and types is a crime that is not subject to prescription...the State shall guarantee fair compensation for the victims of such violations". The Public Prosecution investigates all cases brought to its

attention on claims of subjection to torture or harsh treatment. It undertakes the procedures required for a criminal investigation. It is also responsible for surveillance of prisons and other places of detention for serving prison sentences. The Public Prosecution regularly undertakes surprise visits, at least once a month, and whenever required.

Second: Respect for Human Rights While Countering Terrorism

- Terrorism is in itself a grave violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, on top of which the right to life and security. This is what the world is witnessing now, and from which Egypt is suffering. Despite the scale of violence and barbaric acts committed by terrorist organisations in Egypt and the Middle East, wasting the lives of innocent civilians and terrifying society, Egypt adheres firmly to ensure the highest possible guarantees for the respect for human rights. It has opted not to apply any extraordinary measures while fighting terrorism, relying on the stipulations of the penal code that provide guarantees for citizens' rights, while introducing a few amendments as required.
- The draft anti-terrorism law is ready for adoption. It encompasses all the guarantees compliant with United Nations standards, balancing out the preservation of rights and freedoms on one side, and the required measures to combat terrorism on the other side. Notwithstanding, the law has not been issued in waiting to be presented to the upcoming parliament once convened. This confirms a keenness to protect the rights of Egyptians and ensuring them the widest possible guarantees. Our international partners have to recognise the scale and impact of terrorism on our democratic path .. terrorism that is not hindered by borders. We look forward to the support and assistance of the international community in our fight against terrorism and its total annihilation.

Third: The promotion and Protection of economic, social and cultural rights

Mr. President,

Progress in the promotion and protection of human rights cannot be achieved except through integrated efforts in all fields of rights, be they civil and political or economic, social, and cultural.

- In this regard, and for example, the Egyptian government has specified, through the social security programme, a minimum standard of living for social segments living in poverty and extreme poverty. It also provides support to those affected by disasters. In addition, the family social security

pension has been raised by 50%. Also, a minimum and a maximum income level for government officials have been specified.

- Egypt, in cooperation with civil society, designed a comprehensive housing strategy for the period 2012-2027. The strategy aims to provide housing to limited-income families, women breadwinners, persons with disabilities, youths, and others. A law on social housing has been issued. In addition, the Egyptian Fund for Financing Housing Mortgage contributed to the implementation of a number of housing projects and provides programmes for house loans.
- The State is also keen to achieve comprehensive development for all social categories and country areas, especially those most in need for care; for example Sinai, Upper Egypt, and border areas. It focuses on supporting associations working in the field of developing local communities. A new ministry has been established responsible for civil development and slums, and another for small and medium-sized enterprises.
- The government is also involved in the implementation of holistic national strategies to address unemployment on the short and long terms. It further intensifies its efforts to eradicate illiteracy.

Fourth: Respect for and Protection of Women's Rights

- The role of women and their rights are at the top of the State priority list. This has been emphasized by the Constitution in a number of its articles, which we are already implementing. For instance, the law on the House of Representatives stipulates that at least 50% of electoral lists are women and that at least 50% of appointed representatives are women.
- In the social and economic fields, women government employees enjoy total equality with men. Laws further take into consideration women's family role and duties.
- In coordination with the National Council for Women, the government provided support to women living in poverty to issue identity cards, where the number of cards issued so far reached around 2.7 million. This was done with the aim of facilitating their access to state services in all fields. The government was also able to establish "women health centres" in most governorates.
- In addressing violence against women, legal sanctions for harassment have been tightened as a result of an amendment to the penal code in June 2014. The amendment includes, for the first time, a broad and detailed definition

of sexual harassment. In addition, the Ministry of Interior dedicated a hotline to receive reports on cases of harassment and rape. It also provides centres for care and treatment of women victims of rape and those subjected to violence. A female police force has been assigned to deal with those cases.

- We will later elaborate on further action taken in this domain.

Fifth: The rights of the Child and Persons with Disabilities

- The 2014 constitution includes rights and scope of protection for children unprecedented in previous Egyptian constitutions, including for children with disabilities. The State provides all types of comprehensive care to children through care units across the country, for example nurseries, shelters, and alternative families. Underway is a project on the rural child. It has also established care centres for the development and care of working children, as a mechanism to achieve social care and development, in addition to other programmes and services.
- Regarding persons with disabilities, the National Council for Persons with Disabilities was established in 2012. It has supervisory and coordination roles. The Council was represented in the Committee of the Fifty, responsible for amending the Constitution. The Constitution itself obligates the State to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities in the health, economic, social, and cultural fields; providing them with work opportunities; creating an enabling environment responsive to their needs; facilitating their practice of political rights; and enjoyment of equality and equal opportunity. The new Law on the House of Representatives specified an appropriate representation of persons with disabilities in parliament. In cooperation with a number of civil society organizations, a new draft law is underway to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. In addition, a review is being undertaken of all relevant rules and ministerial decisions to align them with the Constitution and the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to which Egypt is a party.
- Furthermore, a database on persons with disabilities has been finalised, registering around 13 thousand cases in Egypt out of 400 thousand cases based on data collection. These have been circulated on municipalities and local authorities for data completion and specification of type of disability in order to provide required care and services.

Sixth: Cooperation with International Human Rights Mechanisms

- Egypt is keen to further its cooperation with the OHCHR. This has been translated in the frequent visits Egypt received from expert missions from the Office following the 25th of January revolution in 2011, 2012, 2013, and two visits in 2014.
- This interaction aims to design and implement technical assistance programmes in Egypt in three important issue areas, namely security, judiciary, and parliament, within the context of capacity building and awareness-raising on human rights issues at the national level as part of a technical cooperation programme agreed upon by the government and the OHCHR.
- In addition, exchanged visits included serious consultations to finalize an agreement on an OHCHR Regional Office for North Africa to be hosted by Egypt. I have the pleasure to announce to you today that Egypt has already submitted its version of the draft agreement, based on national consensus backed by a political will at the highest State leadership level. The upcoming period will witness intensification of consultations towards finalising the agreement for signature and its submission to the Egyptian parliament once convened.
- Regarding cooperation with Council mechanisms, Egypt received in 2010, following its first review, the special rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children. In addition, the government issued in March 2014 invitations to a number of Council mandate holders, including the special rapporteur on truth, justice, reconciliation, and guarantees of non-recurrence. Preparations are underway to finalise dates and programmes of expected visits.

Seventh: Human Rights Education and Training

Mr. President,

A true realisation of human rights is greatly interlinked with disseminating a human rights culture in society. The State recognizes the importance of awareness-raising in supporting its legislative and executive steps in the field of human rights. Accordingly, we have developed education curricula to include information on human rights and freedoms in a manner that takes into consideration the age and maturity of pupils and students. International human rights law has become a standing subject in university curricula in a number of colleges, such as the faculty of law and the police academy.

- In addition, the Government provides financial support to civil society organizations working in the field of human rights on awareness-raising of citizens of their constitutional and legal rights.
- In line with the above, mechanisms at the ministry of interior have been developed; a new department on human rights and social communication has been established at the ministry.

Mr. President,

What I have recounted represents a small part of the steps taken to promote and realise the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Egyptian citizen. This comes not only as part of the fulfilment of our relevant international obligations, but as a direct response to the demands of the Egyptian people. As I have mentioned earlier, those demands surpass the ceiling of recommendations received and accepted in 2010.

The matter is not limited to drafting legislation but goes beyond that to include policies and programmes. This is what we are working on. Out of practice, we verily realise the scale of the challenges we face in various sectors, especially in the fields of economic and social rights. These occupy a priority concern and at the same time require capacity building and an increase of allocated resources.

In conclusion, the Egyptian delegation is happy to receive your comments and listen to your interventions and respond to them in an atmosphere of dialogue and constructive engagement for a healthy exchange of thoughts and views.

Thank you for listening.