Delegation from Represented by

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**Committee:** Commission on the Status of Women

I. Women and Sustainability

Female equality is crucial to sustainable development. Unfortunately the connection between sustainability and women’s empowerment in the environmental movement and food security and menstrual waste issues has been grossly overlooked.  Gender bias has been deeply rooted in cultures, as well as political, social, and economic structures and institutions. This heavily hinders women and girls from participating fully in society.

Egypt has seen a striking transformation since the events of January 2011, which led to the ejectment of President Hosni Mubarak. Changes in Egypt are increasing more rapidly than any time in recent history. It has kept women’s participation at the forefront of their issue of bringing about a clear and impactful change.

Egypt has always viewed women as an integral part of society and as vital agents of change. We realize women bring a different and unique perspective.  Thus, in 2011, the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) ensured that gender considerations will be taken into account in national climate change initiatives and policies, so both men and women can have equal opportunity to understand, participate and contribute to sustainability issues. Egypt aims to be a leading example in aiding the gender challenges brought on by climate change. We also strongly feel the need for women to be taught income generating skills as well in order for this to come to fruition.

Women must be able to become public leaders and remove themselves from the typical

Eastern culture they have been portrayed in.  Cultural barriers are far more hindering to women then religious barriers.  Islam does consist of gender defining roles, which are further embedded through our culture. An example is the stigma brought forth on menstruating women.  Islamic rules for menstruating women are complex. It is haram or forbidden for a woman to offer certain prayers in such a state and also men cannot divorce their wives during their period.  These rules need to be examined closely to the comfort given to women during such a taxing time instead of merely stigmatizing a woman, which is rife in Egyptian culture.  Egypt strongly suggests a division be made between culture and religion in order to help relieve women of such stigmas and reinforce them to be considered as productive members of society.

Additionally, we firmly believe women are an intrinsic part of the solution. They possess key roles within the household to change the attitudes and behavior of their families and are mainly responsible for providing food and water.  Their role as primary land, water and natural resource managers cannot be undervalued.

In March of 2015, the Egyptian Exchange, a governmental restructuring and economic reform program, initiated the Ring Bell for Gender Equality Program in which a series of bell ringing ceremonies took place to raise awareness of gender equality initiatives and efforts worldwide. “You are putting the principle of gender equality on the top of the agenda,” stated CEO Dr. Mohammed Omran at the Exchange’s opening bell ringing event.  The Egyptian Exchange currently has woman filling 7% of leadership positions and 25% of the labor force and has set a goal to raise female employment to 50%.

Furthermore, at the 2016 UN Global Compact Leaders Summit in New York, Dina Sheriff, formed Ahead of the Curve to help provide capacity building opportunities for social leaders and celebrate women leaders and change makers from the region. Over 120 Egyptian companies and non-business organizations have joined the UN Global Compact, the world’s largest corporate sustainability initiative.

Egypt is pursuing to empower women to be avid political participants.  We have focused on including special measures to ensure women’s representation in elected bodies.  The House of Representative law, which would elect a new legislature, was ratified by former interim President Adly Mansour on June 5, 2014, but was eventually amended after the National Council for Women pushed for higher representation.  The new law ensures that women gain 56 elected seats plus 14 appointed seats, thus yielding 70 seats as compared to the previous parliament where women held less than 2% of seats.

Egypt is also proud of collaborating with the UNDP, UN Women and the Ministry of State for Administrative Development, and the Social Fund for Development on the implementation of the “Women’s Citizenship Initiative”. This specific initiative issues national ID cards for rural women to enable them to vote, have availability to public services, and, moreover, be able to enjoy all the privileges of full citizenship rights.

On March 7, 2015 in Cairo, Coca Cola, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality,­ and the Empowerment of Women launched a women’s empowerment program as part of the Coca Cola Company’s global 5by20 initiative to enable the economic empowerment of 4,000 Egyptian women through providing retail outlets, upgrading Manual Distribution Centers (MDCs), and adding new distribution vehicles such as motor tricycles.  In addition, the program provides women with business skills courses on topics including financial literacy and general project management.

Egypt is making great strides, but it still has a long road to walk before full gender equality can become a mainstream entity. We strongly feel gender equality and women empowerment are foundations of sustainable development and are cures for poverty and social exclusion.

Egypt wants to help start initiatives to overcome lack of business skills and training, as well as aid in providing resources and mentors to help make successful female leaders and business owners.  When women excel, then their communities and families also excel, which has an empowering effect into future generations.

Egypt firmly believes women empowerment is a step towards gender equality, which is vital to sustainable development. Women need to be given the autonomy to manage their own lives.    Egypt firmly believes women education needs to prioritize reproductive health and natural resource management.  An education on reproductive health will allow for women to choose when to have children and the steps that lead to healthy pregnancies. Additionally, an education on natural resources is crucial, as whatever women learn about nutrition and preservation of the environment is used to oversee their families’ health and diets. Additionally, women do not get paid for the work they perform within their families. For this reason, we are steadfast believers that economic empowerment is essential.  Strategic interventions need to be instituted immediately in all levels of policy making to facilitate this.

Egypt is willing to help in innovation and job creation for women and has a strong interest in improving the universal situation of all women.  There needs to be more safe spaces where women can freely discuss issues pertaining to women’s rights or health.  An increase in savings and income is also necessary; women need to be able to invest money and receive microloans to start businesses. This will allow for the economic empowerment necessary for viable sustainable development policies. Egypt looks forward to collaborating to set up initiatives to help alleviate gender type stereotypes and help women become productive citizens of communities around the world.

II.  Elimination of Gender-Based Violence

Violence against women has a lasting effect on society.  Women need to be able to live freely and not in fear.  Gender-based violence is a global issue, which affects many people around the globe.  Women and girls are the most affected, however. Issues such as forced marriages, dowry related violence, marital assault and consent, and female infanticide all pertain to the female.  But, in order to see a change, it is imperative that men and boys be brought into this dialogue.

Egypt intensely senses that prevention, treatment, and legal pathways have to be utilized in order to eliminate gender-based violence.  There has to be a transformation in attitudes and norms along with drastic policy making.  17% of girls in Egypt are married before their eighteenth birthday; the rate of child marriage is definitely at a decline in Egypt, but, nevertheless, traditional customs have slowed the progress.  Child marriage mainly affects girls living in poor rural areas in Egypt.  The 2015 Trafficking in Persons report highlights cases where individuals from the Gulf buy Egyptian girls for temporary marriages, prostitution, or forced labor.  This takes place mainly for families to profit from these transactions.  Poverty is the main reason for Egyptian girls in rural areas being sold to wealthy men.  “I cannot call this a marriage but rather a kind of legalized prostitution or a form of human trafficking,” stated Mervat About Ouf of Egypt’s National Council for Women. “It is widespread in some villages because of rampant poverty and ignorance.” In 2008, Egypt passed an amendment to the Child Law, which prohibits registering a marriage if a constituent is under the age of eighteen.  This helps with the attainment of divorce.  The bill states that violators of this law who try to circumvent the process and not register the marriage shall receive disciplinary punishment.  The law has to protect such gender-based violence.

The legal age of marriage in Egypt was increased to eighteen following the amendment of Egypt’s Child Law in 2008.  After the Egyptian Revolution in 2011, there were talks to reduce the minimum age of marriage from eighteen to almost as low as nine years old. However, the National Council for Women intervened and the proposals were crushed.

Egypt applied a two-prong strategy. The main prong was to not overlook a child’s right, which would not only be held by the Constitution, but also by religion.  Mammon Garb, a jurisprudence professor from al-Azhar University states that the marriage of underage girls to men decades their senior for money is against the teachings of Islam.  Egypt has taken a proactive step to promote the rights of children.

A woman’s ability to be able to free herself from marital assault becomes difficult since divorce procedures are different for male and females in Egypt.  A man can divorce his wife by saying he divorces her three times.  On the other hand, a wife-initiated divorce could take long periods of time.  In 2000, women were allowed to get a khula, in which a woman could pursue a divorce without proving fault of the husband.  Egypt is, thus, making strides and will readily aid in providing protocol initiatives to facilitate women rights in other countries. Egypt believes the only way women can live with equal rights and without fear is to institute legal action for gender-based violence such as honor killings and female infanticide.

III. Women in Education and Employment

Education and employment are essential for humankind to survive. We feel both education and employment are of utmost importance.  Nevertheless, the unemployment rate for women in Egypt is more than double that for men. According to a report by CAPMAS issued in February 2014, women's unemployment reached 24% in 2013, compared with 9.8% for men.

Obstacles to women's participation in the labor market include the social conditions that still hinder the advancement of women at work. Amirah El-Haddad, a professor of Economics at Cairo University, notes that Egyptian women in the official labor market make up 19% of the total labor force in Egypt from 2001 to 2007. This rate is lower in the private sector in particular, where it reached only 16% compared with 26% in the public sector during the same period.

Egypt understands that the reason behind women’s low participation in economic activities is gender discrimination, which is manifested in occupational segregation or wage discrepancies.

Nevertheless, as of 2011, overall literacy rates were 93.2% in men and 86.5% in women.  Egypt has invested financially to better its education system.  Younger generations are much more literate then older generations. In 2011 it is estimated that 2.6 million students studied in tertiary education and 51% of them were females.  This is higher than the Arab regional and global averages of 24% and 29% respectively. An exception to this phenomenon would be rural adult women, who are lacking literacy.  In 2006, the Human Development Report estimated that only 15% of females in rural areas were literate. This issue must be redressed.

Education will empower and facilitate in paving the path to create an identity, which will also aid in lowering the number of honor killings and abuse toward women.  Egypt urges for education for both men and women, so they can better themselves and their communities.

Egypt has always supported innovative ways of assisting women.  We urge the private sector to provide women with more job opportunities. Business owners should be given incentives such as tax breaks to hire a larger number of women as well.

Citations

* “Middle East and North Africa: Women in the Workforce” The World Bank.2010 Retrieved 27 March 2014
* “Education” World Education News and Reviews. 4 November 2013. Retrieved 10 April 2014