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peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Center for Egyptian Women’s Legal
Assistance Foundation, a non-governmental organization in
consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being
circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council
resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.
Statement

Women’s empowerment between feminists’ efforts and general media’s violence against women

While women are trying to fight for their rights in Egypt, the patriarchal systems are using new and innovative defence mechanisms against the progressive discourse and demands women ask for; especially, using media and different religious groups.

The government protects and monitors the religious groups in Egypt, despite their anti-women discourse. Regardless of which religion is used or targeted, the religious institutions are pushed to protect the government rhetoric on its extreme measures against women’s rights. In Egypt, a certain religious group became very close to the power despite their retroactive belief against women. They called for cancelling Khul’ law, the woman’s right to divorce herself, and decriminalizing the Female Genital Mutilation law. Instead of being pushed aside, they were rewarded by the authorities and granted licenses to preach in public. On the other hand and despite the crackdown on certain religious groups in Egypt, other more fanatic religious groups are cooperating with the government against human rights and women’s rights discourse in order to avoid being detained or attacked by the state. This silent, yet powerful, cooperation between the government and religious groups results in not only disseminating anti-women rhetoric in public, but also emphasizing the patriarchal and violent culture against women.

On the other hand, not only religious groups are used in such process, media is also playing a major role in establishing a culture of sexism and violence against women. Media either allow fanatic religious groups to spread their ideologies without creating a healthy space for debate or opposite views, or send indirect and direct messages about women’s “natural” roles. Women are often presented as vulnerable, frivolous human beings who need to be disciplined and controlled all the time. Feminists, in particular, are under attack from media, whether state-owned media or private practices as feminists are portrayed as immoral, men-like women. While topics like discriminatory laws and violence against women are not getting media attention most of the time, media is used to attack women human rights defenders’ personal lives in order to discredit them before the public.

We would like to underline, that in Egypt the most dangerous cooperation against women happens between the state, religious groups, and the media. The religious discourse used in the media, with blessings from the state, gets huge attention and is used to distract the public opinion from other emerging issues. As women are vilified in the dominating religious rhetoric, their rights are sidelined and disregarded most of the time. Claiming that women have all the rights they need by a direct order from God, the religious groups never answered concretely why then violence against women is drastically increasing.

Fundamentalism is growing without any real will or efforts to combat such thoughts and ideologies. It is crucial to set implementation strategies for the Sustainable Development Goals in order to empower women and girls. As much as we currently need new progressive religious discourse, we also need a cooperative media that is at least willing to display a wide spectrum of opinions. Such mantra is much needed in order to be able to eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls in order to achieve the wanted empowerment and gender equality.