

# **Memo to Dr. Ibrahim Mahlab, Prime Minister**

**July 24, 2014**

The undersigned organizations strongly object to the bill on civil society organizations which has been put forward by the Ministry of Social Solidarity. We further object to the escalating steps recently taken by this Ministry, including its issuance of a notice on page 22 of the 18 July 2014 issue of the *Ahram* newspaper, through which the Ministry sent a warning to what it called the “entities” working in civil society that they would be dissolved within 45 days. The undersigned organizations consider this to be equivalent to a declaration of war by the government on freedom of association and the work of civil society organizations in Egypt. We further consider this to be a blatant attack on other long-established legal systems regulating companies in the fields of law and other activities related to development, academia, and culture. Such a step could severely undermine the Egyptian legal framework and destroy any remaining confidence in the legal and judicial systems. Furthermore, it may very well lead to the closure of a large number of Egyptian human rights organizations and the imprisonment of those who work in them, particularly in light of the fact that the largest international human rights organizations have already left the country due to the increased pressures and security harassment they faced in Egypt, as well as the refusal of the authorities to grant these organizations legal authorization to carry out their work in the country.

It is shocking that this severe deterioration should occur only two months before Egypt is scheduled to undergo its second Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the situation of human rights in the country, a process which will be undertaken by the United Nations in October and November of this year. Regrettably, since Egypt’s first UPR in 2010, the government has not upheld the commitments that it made at that time to improve the environment in which NGOs work and to amend the infamous associations law no. 84/2002 to bring it into compliance with international standards.

The undersigned human rights organizations call upon the government to take a number of serious, immediate measures to put a stop to the ongoing deterioration of the state of human rights in Egypt, to bolster society's ability to resist terrorism, and to provide a positive indication about the sincerity of its intentions to establish a state based on the rule of law and respect for the constitution, which was approved by millions of Egyptians in the referendum earlier this year. The steps that must be taken without delay include the following:

- The draft law on civil society organizations, which was recently put forward by the Ministry of Social Solidarity and which adopts a hostile stance towards the work of civil society, should be retracted. This bill would lead to the "nationalization" of civil society, transforming it into a quasi-governmental sector, and subject NGOs to unrestricted prerogatives of the security apparatus. Moreover, this bill represents a flagrant violation of the constitution, which was approved by Egyptians in the referendum of January 2014.
- The Ministry of Social Solidarity should return to deliberate the associations bill which was drafted by a committee formed by a decree from the former Minister of Social Solidarity, Dr. Ahmed Bora'i, at the end of 2013. This bill was then presented by the Egyptian government to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, such that this bill might be the basis for a societal debate with the aim of improving it to become more consistent with international standards on freedom of association. These steps were taken in preparation for the bill to be presented to the new parliament once elections were held.
- The government should revoke the notice issued by the Ministry of Social Solidarity in the *Ahram* newspaper, as previously mentioned.
- Technical consultations with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should be requested when drafting any associations law, in order to ensure that this legislation will comply with Egypt's international commitments under Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Egypt is party.

Finally, the government must renounce its deep-seated propensity to impose its control over civil society organizations (of which there are nearly 40,000 in Egypt) and its attempts to silence them. It must put an end to the daily interference of the security apparatus in the work of civil society. And it must review its policies towards NGOs and come

to view the activities and the criticisms of the government made by these organizations as an opportunity to improve the performance of the government, to develop the services it provides, to affirm the respect it affords to human rights. Such changes would have a positive impact towards strengthening society's ability to resist terrorism and towards restoring stability and economic prosperity to the country.

### **Signatory Organizations:**

1. **Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies**
2. **Al Haqanya Center for Rights and law**
3. **Appropriate Communications Techniques for Development (ACT)**
4. **Arab Network for Human Rights Information**
5. **Arab Organization for Penal Reform**
6. **Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression**
7. **Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement**
8. **Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights**
9. **Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms**
10. **Egyptian Foundation for Advancement of the Childhood Condition (EFACC)**
11. **Egyptian foundation for Democracy**
12. **Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights**
13. **Egyptian Network for Public Participation**
14. **Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance**
15. **El-Mahrousa Network**
16. **Habi Center for Environmental Rights**
17. **Human Rights Association for the Assistance of Prisoners**
18. **Misryoun Against Religious Discrimination (MARED)**
19. **National Community for Human Rights and Law**
20. **Nazra for Feminist Studies**
21. **New Woman Foundation**
22. **Women and Memory Forum**
23. **United Group - Attorneys at Law, Legal Advisors and Human Rights Advocates**