



CAIRO INSTITUTE
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES
Institut du Caire pour Les études des droits de l'homme
مركز القاهرة لدراسات حقوق الإنسان

Human Rights Council – 19th Session
ID with the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
5 March 2012

Delivered by: Mohamed Zaree

Thank you Madam President,

The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) welcomes the report of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders. In the joint statement released by a number of UN experts on Egypt last November, referenced in this report, the Special Rapporteur stated that “human rights defenders, including activists and NGOs, are crucial in the promotion and consolidation of democratic life in societies” and that “states should create an enabling environment so that human rights defenders can carry out their activities”.

Contrary to the Special Rapporteur’s recommendations and consistent with her concerns, independent civil society in Egypt is currently facing the worst crackdown since its emergence in 1985. Since the Council last met in September, 17 NGO offices were raided by security forces and members of the prosecution. National and international workers in foreign human rights and democracy groups were referred to court on criminal charges in what has been known as the “foreign funding case.” Hundreds of others are still awaiting their fate as the recent decision to lift the travel ban on international staff of foreign organizations does not halt the prosecution of NGOs and their staff members. Sadly this case happens amidst raising public doubts regarding the independence of judiciary in Egypt. Almost all national and international independent human rights organizations in Egypt are facing a severe government led smear campaign aimed at defaming them in the eyes of the public, labelling them as foreign agents aspiring to disturb public stability and divide Egypt.

The strategies used by the authorities in this case are characterized by unpredictability, manipulation of facts, and complete disregard of the law. On December 21, the Minister of Justice, without any legal grounds, held human rights organizations responsible for deadly attacks against protesters on different occasions. Additionally, the investigative judges appointed to the “foreign funding” case revealed details of the investigation allegedly linking the NGOs under investigation to a foreign conspiracy to divide Egypt. Such defaming statements aim to shift the blame for, and distract from, the violations committed by the ruling authorities that are highlighted in the Special Rapporteur’s report. Authorities in Egypt are basing their investigations on the draconian legislations passed by the Mubarak government to curtail the work of civil society – the same legislations previously criticized by this Council and deemed restrictive.

In such a context, the current vicious crackdown against civil society cannot be viewed separately from the widespread and severe violations that have characterized the transitional phase in Egypt. At this critical time in Egypt’s history, we urge the Special Rapporteur to devote further attention to the role of Human Rights Defenders in the context of transition and continue to address the ongoing – and in some cases worsening – reprisals and attacks against them.

Thank you.