



Geneva, 1 March 2017

Civil Society Speaker Statement to the High Level Segment of the 34th Session of the Human Rights Council

Ms Mozn Hassan

Mr. President, Excellencies:

My name is Mozn Hassan. I am an Egyptian woman rights advocate. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of civil society in the high level segment of the Human Rights Council. Unfortunately, I am unable to be present with you due to a travel ban imposed on me on 27 June 2016. My situation is emblematic of the grave violations that rights defenders, including women rights defenders, face on a daily basis in the region I am from. I have also had my assets frozen in a case in which I risk life imprisonment. The only crime I have committed is to stand up for the rights of women and civil society.

Throughout the MENA region, women human rights defenders (WHRDs) calling for respect for the fundamental rights of women are subjected to a wide range of violations: from enforced disappearances and sexual violence, as apparent in Yemen, Syria and Sudan; to second class citizenship and denial of basic rights in places like Saudi Arabia where women are subjected to a "guardianship" system that restricts their ability to drive, travel and take employment. In Kuwait, WHRDs are deprived from freedom of expression due to a draconian cyber law, and the same situation exists in Bahrain and Oman. In Lebanon, WHRDs working on immigrant rights have been deported. Even in relatively stable countries such as Tunisia and Morocco, WHRDs working on sexual rights have been subjected to criminal prosecution and assassinated.

It is crucial to contemplate the role of various governments in what WHRDs are subjected to. With the rise of societal violence and extremism in the region, governments are prioritizing security measures at the expense of promoting civic and political rights. In fact, governments are coopting the role agents of change play such as WHRDs, while orchestrating crackdowns against them under the guise of achieving stability. It is critical that governments recognize that stability will never be achieved without the establishment of open civic spaces and



democratic processes that include WHRDs as agents of change. And public freedoms and democracy is impossible without the unhindered participation of women in public affairs.

The United Nations can play an important role in the struggle for the women's rights. Rhetorical support must be matched with concrete monitoring and country specific action. The Human Rights Council can and should create a means to ensure regular scrutiny of a state's commitment to the implementation of the WHRD Resolution, adopted at the General Assembly in November 2013 and related recommendations made during the Universal Periodic Review process and during the CEDAW treaty body proceedings. Something akin to a "universal women's rights review" within the Human Rights Council would be a powerful tool not only to protect the rights of women, but to strengthen economic development and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5, which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls.

We hope and trust that the United Nations will take serious steps to ensure that the rights of WHRDs in the MENA region are protected and promoted and that they are able to exercise their right to the advancement of human rights in a functional civic space free from all forms of violence and discrimination.

Thank you.

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