



**29th session of the
Human Rights Council**

**Interactive Dialogue on Working Group on Discrimination Against Women
18 June 2015**

Thank you Mr. President. CIVICUS welcomes the important report of the Working Group on discrimination against women, a report, especially in an Egyptian context, so very relevant at this critical time.

The report reiterates that states' obligations to ensure gender equality and to combat discrimination and violence against women in the family and culture is closely linked to ensuring equality at all levels in society. It also underlines the obligation of states to protect the rights of women who do not conform to the gender stereotypes that predominate in some cultures and those who openly contest them, which especially includes women human rights defenders who are particularly vulnerable to discrimination, violence and criminalization.

In Egypt, women are subjected to discrimination and violence in the family in various ways. 90% of girls still undergo FGM in spite of a ban in 2008. Many women continue to suffer under legalized polygamy and discriminatory laws and practices applied to Christian and Muslim women on issues of marriage, divorce, custody and inheritance. Article 60 of the Penal Code codifies impunity in cases of domestic violence as a judge can give clemency to the perpetrator if he acts in good faith.

This acceptance of discrimination and violence against women in the family in law and in practice only encourages similar violations in the public sphere. The definition of rape and the criminalization of sexual harassment are insufficient and prevent women from accessing justice. A recent report by FIDH shows how state actors use sexual violence as a systematic tool to persecute women human rights defenders.

Currently human rights defenders and organisations are under tremendous pressure in Egypt; they are under investigation by the authorities, imprisoned, killed in protests and banned from traveling and carrying out their work. As women human rights defenders are already vulnerable to discrimination and violence, these restrictions greatly compound persistent repression.

We therefore strongly encourage the Egyptian Government to take all necessary measures to protect women human rights defenders and in particular release those imprisoned for protesting peacefully, including Yara Salem and Mahienour El-Massry, end the travel bans, including against Esraa Abdel Fattah and drop the charges against Azza Soliman who is still under trial for breaching the protest law after witnessing the killing of women human rights defender Shaimaa El Sabbagh. Thank you