Egypt Country Statement

**Key Messages**
- Egyptians lack basic education and are not well informed of human rights
- women are caught between military rule and radical Islamist ideology
- recent restrictions curtail NGOs and journalists’ activists and ability to limit abuses of power

**Key Recommendations**
- work with the Egyptian government to institute comprehensive education reform

Egyptian women are caught between military rule and radical Islamist ideology, with few opportunities for true and effective political and social participation. Between the prevalent cultural norms that condone and even endorse, violence against women, and the implicitly authoritarian nature of military regimes, women stand slim chances of empowerment.

This situation is also due to systemic poor quality education. Egypt ranks 141 out of 144 in the Global Competitiveness Report of 2014-2015. Had Egyptians been well informed, military rule or radical ideologies would not have been established in our country, nor would anyone have supported oppression and voted for Islamists or military leaders. Research also shows that Egyptians are neither supportive of the women rights movements nor of the empowerment of women. This is also due to the absence of education and awareness of basic human rights.

In such political and cultural circumstances, the burden of changing women’s status falls on civil society. However, the work of civil rights groups, NGOs and journalists who serve as watchdogs to limit the abuse of power by officials has been severely limited in past months. Authoritarian tendencies in the current government remain a source of concern. The restrictions imposed on civil society create serious impediments in political education and awareness raising efforts. The government is targeting activists who dare to mobilize the public or challenge the dominant political discourse. Many are in prison others are facing arrest and convictions, or being forced to leave their homeland.

International pressure and statements have little impact on the regime now. Egyptian officials are using the excuse of fighting terrorism to counter dissent and to curtail rights and freedoms. As activists and civil society organizations, we are working towards longer term approaches with emphasis on the education of women and youth, raising their awareness of their basic human rights and issues of justice and equality.

We need quality education to build a generation of aware citizens to make the changes needed for the future of our country. If NGOs work with international supporters to provide basic education, the road to political awareness will be paved. Since NGO work faces many difficulties and restrictions in Egypt today, we need our international supporters to work with the Egyptian government on education reform, via a fully comprehensive project encompassing curricula, school reform, teacher training, etc. Such efforts should include Egyptian civil society and NGOs as full partners from the start and should be closely monitored to ensure sustainability and effectiveness.

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