

UN criticizes Egypt's rights record and calls for increased investment in economic and social rights

PRESS RELEASE

12 December 2013. New York/Cairo:

The United Nations has raised serious concerns over shortcomings in the provision of a broad range of human rights in Egypt. Last week the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights released the [findings of its review](#) after the North African country came before a UN human rights treaty body for the first time since the Arab Spring on November 14th. The Committee, which is mandated to oversee compliance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, expressed its concerns about the enjoyment of these rights in the country, ranging from rising unemployment, to increasing food insecurity, inadequate affordable housing, low health insurance coverage, and insufficient social assistance programs. The UN experts called attention to Egypt's weak legal protection for human rights, its longstanding underinvestment in the social sector, and the exclusion of civil society groups and other stakeholders from policy-making.



In its assessment, the Committee concluded that Egypt was not adequately investing in economic, social and cultural rights and expressed its concern about wide disparities in the provision of essential services. It noted that persistently low budgetary allocations, especially to health, education, housing, water and sanitation, and social security “has resulted in retrogression in the effective enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the Covenant, disproportionately impacting disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups”. It also criticized reductions in food subsidies and “the increasing recourse to regressive indirect taxes without prior assessment of their potentially severe human rights impacts and careful consideration of more equitable revenue collection alternatives”.

The Committee also expressed its “deep concern” about the impact that corruption has on the Egyptian State’s “ability to mobilise available resources to the maximum extent” and recommended that Egypt strengthen its legislation to combat corruption, as well as take international human rights obligations into account when negotiating with international financial institutions, in order to ensure that human rights, especially of vulnerable groups, are not harmed.

The 18-member body of experts also identified a variety of rights not adequately protected under Egyptian law. Criticizing laws which limit freedom of association and union plurality and impose restrictions on the right to strike, the Committee called on Egypt to amend its Labor Law and Trade Union Act. It also expressed its concern that the low “legal minimum wage does not guarantee a decent standard of living and is not linked to inflation rates”, and “only applies to the public sector”, also noting the lack of adequate safeguards to regulate conditions of large numbers of workers employed in the informal sector.

The Committee called on Egypt to establish a legal entitlement to security of tenure, to combat the “widespread” practice of forced evictions and to provide remedy, restitution and compensation to individuals and families that have been subjected to this practice. In addition, it flagged areas where legislation was not being effectively implemented, recommending that Egypt ensure better enforcement of legal sanctions to address the high incidence of child labor, violence against women, and female genital mutilation, for example. Failure to protect places of worship, particularly Copt churches, was another concern raised by the Committee.

The need for more transparent, participatory, and evidence-based policy-making was repeatedly stressed. In particular, the Committee recommended that civil society be afforded meaningful channels for participating in budget formulation and policy making and called for better collection of disaggregated data, in order to monitor the implementation of relevant laws and policies. For example, the Committee urged Egypt “to develop, in consultation with civil society, a coherent market policy for addressing unemployment”, in particular aimed at women and youth. It likewise called on the country to strengthen its National Human Rights Commission, to ensure its independence and effectiveness.

The UN Committee’s recommendations follow its [dialogue](#) with an Egyptian government delegation on November 14. Committee members benefited from a detailed analysis provided in a [joint civil society report](#), endorsed by a broad coalition of 58 national and international civil society organizations, which was submitted in advance of the dialogue.

The Committee’s findings demonstrate that successive post-revolution administrations have failed to take meaningful steps to address the social injustices that fuelled the revolution—injustices in employment, housing, healthcare, education and living standards. These shortcomings are not only a betrayal of the demands of the revolution, but are also, as the recommendations show, in violation of Egypt’s international human rights obligations. Concrete measures, such as progressive fiscal policy reforms, are needed to finally confront the entrenched social injustices that characterized the Mubarak era. Implementing the recommendations of the Committee is an important step towards securing these fundamental reforms. The signatory organizations urge international actors including international financial institutions, international cooperation agencies and private donors to contribute to the effective implementation of these concerns and recommendations by pressing the Egyptian Government to integrate them into policy and law reforms during and beyond the transitional period.

Signatories:

- * Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights
- * Center for Economic and Social Rights
- * Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
- * Arab NGO Network for Development
- * Egyptian Center for Civil and Legislative Reform
- * Housing and Land Rights Network- Habibat International Coalition
- * New Woman Foundation
- * Nazra for Feminist Studies
- * Egyptian Association for Collective Rights
- * Al-Shehab Institute for Comprehensive Development
- * Association for Health and Environmental Development
- * Arab House Foundation for Human Rights

- *The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights concluding observations on Egypt can be accessed [in English here](#).*
- *The joint civil society report submitted to the Committee in advance of the review can be found in [English here](#) and in [Arabic here](#).*
- *A factsheet produced by CESR and ECESR, providing a concise graphical illustration of rights retrogressions in the country, can be [downloaded here](#).*
- *The official Egyptian State Replies to the Committee, in preparation for the Committee session, can be [found here](#), with [attached appendices](#) (Arabic Only)*
- *For further information or to arrange interviews please contact CESR Communications Coordinator Luke Holland at lholland@cesr.org.*