

Periodical Profile

The Civil Society and the Reinforcement of Human Rights Culture Reflections on the Egyptian Status

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The relationship between civil society and human rights is one of the most coherent relations. The civil society is the intermediary sphere between the State and individuals; it regulates individuals' action and expresses their interests, which are originally rights, before the State. Therefore, human rights issues occupy an important position within civil society organizations CSOs, especially when expanding their mandate to include civil, political, economic, social or cultural rights, as well as other rights.

This Study seeks to examine the role of civil society in the reinforcement of human rights values on two levels: the theoretical level and the practical one through the analysis of the application of human rights in Egypt, given there are plenty of opportunities to be seized and challenges to be faced. Egypt enjoys a broad vision for human rights that goes beyond awareness and education, since it becomes a mainstream at the levels of civil society and policy-making institutions.

Civil Society in Egypt and Human Rights Issues: Opportunities and Challenges

Many civil society groups and organizations exist in Egypt. Some of these groups are classic organizations that have been deeply rooted for many years, since the early nineteenth century, such as labor unions, trade unions and civil society organizations that work on charity and development. Also, there are modern organizations born a few decades ago, among them the human rights organizations and the independent trade unions, as well as other social and political movements. The role played by human rights organizations in recent decades in defending civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights in general, or even in focusing on the rights of marginalized and vulnerable groups such as women, children and persons with disabilities has significantly impacted the development of the political and social movements in Egypt.

As the patterns and mandates of civil society organizations vary, there is considerable diversity within each pattern. They vary, for example, in the extent of development, area of movement and scope of action. Basically, there are three types of CSOs; the small grassroots organizations that spread widely in the countryside, the medium-size organizations which are mostly located in cities and finally, the large-size organizations whose branches are spread in many rural and urban areas, such as the Shareyah Association, the Association For El Sunna El Mohamadeya, the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services and the Upper Egypt Association for Education and Development.



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Moreover, CSOs vary in terms of their approaches and scope of action. There are three categories of CSOs in Egypt, among them are the charity or pastoral organizations that have been existed for a long time and they represent the majority of CSOs. Besides, there are development organizations that have been linked partly to the flow of foreign funding for civil action. Some of these organizations adopt a human rights approach in its development-related work or what is called the human rights perspective in achieving development. The third category includes the human rights organizations that focus on civil, political, economic and social rights, in addition to organizations concerned with the rights of certain social groups such as women, children, people with disabilities and others. Although such categorization does not prevent the presence of CSOs that adopt more than one approach, where some organizations combine the development and the human rights approach through working in both domains.

Furthermore, the scope of action of human rights organizations operating in Egypt varies. Some of these organizations deal with the rights of all kinds, whether economic, social, political or civil, while others work in the fields of environment, rights of women and children and others. Activities of human rights organizations are mostly confined to a number of key activities such as awareness-raising, launch of campaigns, advocacy, monitoring of violations and publication of studies. In Egypt, there are approximately 360 human rights organizations, whose areas of interest vary between the economic and social rights on the one hand and the civil and political rights on the other, along with those working in both fields. In addition to organizations that are primarily concerned with defending the rights of certain groups whether women, children, peasants, workers, persons with disabilities and others. Moreover, some of these CSOs are registered in accordance with the Law on Non-Governmental Organizations, while others are registered as civil companies or as law firms.

The Constitution of 2014 represents a real opportunity to redefine the relationship between the State and the civil society by stipulating certain provisions on civil society organizations as well as trade and labor unions. These provisions are in consistent with the international standards in terms of respect for the independence of civil action and the alleviation of the interference of the administrative body in the affairs of civil society and other issues. Additionally, Article 93 of the Constitution emphasizes Egypt's adherence to the international obligations.

Egypt's vision for sustainable development 2030 highlights that one of the most crucial challenges is the lack of trust between the State and the civil society, and stresses the need to reestablish the relationship between the two parties. To sum up, the Egyptian Constitution of 2014 and the vision of 2030 represent a good opportunity that shall be seized and adhered to by the State and the civil society, but only in the context of having mutual vision in dealing equally and with the same seriousness with the dangers facing the Egyptian State.