

Sexual Harassment in the Arab Region: Cultural Challenges and Legal Gaps

*Findings from the Conference on
“Sexual Harassment as Social Violence,
and its Effect on Women”*

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Edited by

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- Dr. Helen Rizzo - Head of the Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology and Egyptology department at the American University in Cairo.
- Mrs. Nehad Abul Qomsan - Director of the Egyptian Center for Women Rights.

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Introduction:

The issue of sexual harassment has been a priority for the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) for more than 6 years, as more and more Egyptian and non-Egyptian women have shared their complaints with ECWR because they lack assurance about their personal safety and security in the street. In response, the ECWR began to consider different ways to confront the issue. A long journey began in search of information, data, and statistics in order to quantify the nature of the problem and identify its urgency. However, this search failed due to a serious lack of useful information, except for the public security report, which monitors the increased number of rapes, indecent assaults or verbal innuendos. Sexual harassment as a concept or a crime was not given its due importance, and even the penal code in Egypt did not provide any provisions or any definition of the crime of sexual harassment. However, the penal code does define other relevant crimes, which can be used as a measure or criterion, such as an indecent act in public, or committing an indecent assault against modesty. Hence, it was important to take the initiative and confront this epidemic, which continually grows throughout society.

Accordingly, the issue was thoroughly studied through the analysis of over a hundred complaints. These complaints presented some shocking findings in terms of the overwhelming contradictions to our pre-existing stereotyped notions and which are related to the surrounding circumstances of harassment cases (i.e. place, time, or even the attire or general behavior of female victims). It became clear that sexual harassment occurs day and night and during peak times as well, and that modest clothes fail to protect the victim. It became impossible to depend on a study based on only 100 samples in order to ascertain the magnitude and nature of the problem. Therefore, ECWR carried out a study entitled, "Sexual Harassment...The Social Cancer", with a sample of 2800 females from all different age groups and professions. The sample was intended to be relatively large,

contributing to breaking the silence that surrounds this issue. The large number of female respondents sent a clear message to every girl and woman that she is not alone and she is not to blame. As a result, it shocked the community, as they began to sense a double standard in the way of thinking about sexual harassment.

At a time when we proclaim respect for women's status in society and their dignity, and as we see an increase in the number of women and young girls wearing the hejab at a very early age, sexual harassment has grown in such a frightening way. This study became the foundation on which ECWR based and organized its campaign entitled, "Safe Streets for All", which aimed to restore security and safety back to the Egyptian streets. Following the strong denial of authorities at the beginning of this campaign, it was well received by the media and appreciated by society, and many girls insisted to share freely their opinions and experiences with sexual harassment as well as the extent of their suffering after this happens to them. The campaign supported the awareness-raising efforts inside the Egyptian society towards the concept of sexual harassment, being an intolerable crime due to the serious repercussions it produces later on. One of the various successes of the campaign was that it compelled different authorities to admit that sexual harassment is a problem, despite the differences among them concerning its magnitude or causes. Many voices stood up and placed the blame on the woman as to the reason behind the prevalence of this crime, particularly in cyber space, where some Internet users publish a symbolic photo of an uncovered candy swarmed by flies, as indicative of the importance that women should cover up. And instead of chasing the criminals, some just blamed the victim, leading ECWR to prepare an analytical study entitled, "Clouds in Egypt's Sky." The study includes a sample of 2020 respondents, 1010 women and 1010 men, in addition to 89 non-Egyptian women. The purpose of the study was to reveal the underlying reasons for this problem and identify the trends of the society, men and women.

The study revealed some significant statistics, proving that 83% of Egyptian women and 98% of foreign women have been subjected to sexual harassment. The study's great impact came from determining the essence of the situation and presenting it clearly to the public and decision makers in addition to providing them with the necessary relevant information. The study offers an analysis of a number of hypotheses, including one, which presupposes that a fully covered woman discourages sexual harassment. Thus, it presented six models in different attire and then posed the question to respondents to give their opinion about which attire would a woman would most likely be wearing while harassed. Surprisingly, the answer was that women wearing the hejab are the most vulnerable to harassment more than unveiled women and to the extent that even those who fully cover up (i.e. wear the niqaab, black cover for the head, face and body) are not immune. As a result, this minimized the belief in this misconception.

The study's results were shocking and helped treat the issue with seriousness, as a number of ministries, especially the ministry of tourism, acknowledged the problem's existence and the importance of confronting it. Also, some government authorities proposed various law drafts to combat the phenomenon. Among the study's positive findings, there was breaking the cycle of silence among women who were harassed, and even the courts issued a historic verdict against a defendant who was sentenced to three years in jail for sexually harassing a young girl in Cairo. This verdict was interpreted by many experts, as conveying a judicial message to the Egyptian society, of "no more tolerance for harassers".

ECWR was faced with many challenges throughout its work, including the lack of awareness about the concept of sexual harassment and the means with which we should pose the issue to the public, wondering how it will be received by the mass media and society at large. With all these concerns, we began the preparatory work that lasted for over a year, holding thorough discussions with young men and

women in order to establish the general outline for our campaign, which does not intend to blame men. On the contrary, it intends to place the responsibility with the whole society and establish bridges of dialogue with the community.

Different phases of the campaign each had a special motto, and we can safely say that it was a highly effective campaign, not in Egypt alone but its impact resounded throughout the entire Arab world. We received numerous phone calls from a number of Arab countries inquiring, “how were you able and from where did you gain the courage to break these taboos that surround the female body and her right to confront sexual harassment?”

At the time when almost all the Arab countries are suffering from this same crime, it is still difficult to break the silence of women and it was not an easy task for many of them, particularly in the absence of studies that could help identify the strategy to be undertaken. As a result of this communication and experience with sharing a number of studies, an opportunity emerged that indicated the extensiveness of the problem in other countries. In Algeria 27% of female university students confirmed that they were subject to molestations and sexual misbehaviors by their professors. 44.6% of them complained about verbal utterances, whereas 13.8% said they were subject to physical harassment. In Qatar 21.1% of young girls revealed their vulnerability to the same thing. We also found that 30% of working-women were subjected to sexual harassment in their work places. In Saudi Arabia 22.7% of children face the same matter, as well official reports and statistics showed that in 2002, 9580 ethical incidents included 997 crimes of harassment. In Yemen, 90% of women complained of harassment, whether in public or work places. All this led us to have a closer coordination with women’s associations in various countries such as KSA, Bahrain, Syria, Palestine, Tunisia, Morocco, Sudan and others in order to share experiences and uphold the draft laws that were presented. The latest of which was a draft law put forward to the

Shoura Council in Saudi Arabia that criminalizes sexual harassment.

Based on the above, ECWR has collaborated with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) in conducting a regional conference under the title, “Sexual Harassment...as a Social Violence and Its implications on Women”, from the 13-14 of December 2009. The conference included the participation of some women’s rights leaders, male and female activists from 14 Arab and foreign countries, including: Yemen, UAE, Sudan, KSA, Bahrain, Syria, Jordan, Libya, Sultanate of Oman, Lebanon, Qatar, Morocco, Iraq and Egypt. In addition, a variety of specialists and experts from other foreign countries were in attendance along with 250 participants including consultants, MP’s, civil society representatives, human rights activists, and women’s rights organizations. The conference also hosted figures from the mass media, journalists and radio reporters. It focused on the following objectives:

- Understanding the phenomenon of sexual harassment as a form of social violence against women and how this affects their participation in the public sphere.
- Sharing experiences and lessons learned when facing violence against women.
- Giving an opportunity for cooperation to enhance efforts among countries in the Arab world, with the purpose of reducing social violence at the legislative level.

The conference also attempted to deepen the dialogue on legislation in Arab countries by conducting a survey of current laws dealing with sexual harassment in each nation, with the goal of learning their provisions, especially those laws which introduce the concept of sexual harassment in a country as in Tunisia, Algeria and Saudi Arabia. The findings of this survey detected shortcomings in the laws of each respective country with regard to combating harassment.

Due to the complexity of the issue and the diversity of factors that are all intertwined, it has become appropriate to discuss the matter and consider all its dimensions in an attempt to reach comprehensive solutions, and so three aspects were considered.

First: The Social Aspect

We attempted to set a comprehensive definition of violence and understand its principles, particularly the social violence that affects women in order to understand the role of culture, media, and educational curriculum that contribute to the spread of social violence, in addition to determining the role of the state in combating or encouraging violence. We also attempted to understand the implications of some political parties using women for their political conflicts and debates. In addition, women are used as a symbol to identify a clear criterion for both the criminal and the victim, and pinpoint the acts which are considered social violence and harassment in the work place, serving as a reference for concerned parties and legislators. It is also important to delve into the social, economic and political consequences of the marginalization and seclusion of women, and denying them access to their lawful right of citizenship. In addition, a closer look is needed about the impact of using women as an identity symbol and social property as well as to understand the concept of protection in the intellectual and political trends and study how the motive for protection can actually deprive women of the right to education and work, or leads to harmful practices such as female genital mutilation.

Second: The Legal Aspect

We studied the extent to which international and national legislation meet the need for justice. We highlighted the effectiveness of laws in answering to women's needs and explaining the role of international conventions and treaties in obliging signatory states to effectively

uphold standards and laws related to women's rights, as these conventions impact the national legislation in a given state with regards to the issue of violence against women. We also attempted to identify how domestic laws drive social change. We discussed the different legislative solutions and their applicability in the region. To this end, we learned about the legal situation in the Arab states and classified them into two categories: those states which do not tackle the issue of sexual harassment in their own respective legislature, and those states that adopted laws to address this phenomenon. In addition, we became acquainted with the mechanisms of social mobility with the objective of influencing the creation of certain legislation. Finally, we studied the impact of legislation, its implementation, and its ability to support women's rights and break the cycle of silence.

Third: Civil Society and Media Aspect

It was our aim to identify the role of civil society and the mass media in eliminating the phenomenon of sexual harassment and breaking the silence of victims through exchanging experiences with other countries. With regards to the media, it was important to understand the plan that was adopted and that minimized the magnitude of the problem as well as to form a collective stand against this crime that curbs women's free movement.

The dates of this conference were purposefully selected to coincide with three major occasions: the 60th anniversary of the universal declaration on human rights, the 30th anniversary of the adoption of CEDAW, and the conclusion of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence, which were all adopted by the United Nations in light of the increased use of violence experienced worldwide, in all countries.

A myriad of papers and interventions enriched the conference, and effectively furthered the discussions and deepened the thoughts. Dr.

Farkhonda Hassan, Secretary General of the National Council for Women, in her opening speech stressed the importance of uniting efforts, governmental and civil, with the goal of combating this phenomenon. She noted that sexual harassment is in the public eye and is preoccupying the entire international community including numerous organizations, governmental and non-governmental. The prevalence of sexual harassment is indicative of an ethical crisis and a rooted perception that women are inferior, which has resulted in the progression of minor transgressions from a minority of youth to heinous acts of various forms that psychology and sociology experts have been perplexed to discover its real causes. Some experts attribute these indecencies to poverty and unemployment as well as the delay in the age of marriage and lack of means to get married, an opinion that may contradict the circumstances we are detecting. Dr. Hassan further highlighted the reason for her participation, namely that she wanted to raise a number of difficult questions. She started by asking, “What do you think about the fact that the harassers at work are married? What do you think about the fact that those who harass young girls are usually aging men? What do you think about veiled women or even those who are covered in black (i.e. wearing niqaab) that are harassed, despite the echoed and recurrent talk that only women who are dressed up immodestly are the ones who frequently get harassed? And how do you see the situation when I say that harassment is practiced by relatives and friends, what do you think about incest?”

The whole situation obliges us to exert more effort, to dedicate more time and dig deeper into the matter. The dangers of sexual harassment are the result of its prevalence everywhere, which reflects a disregard and disrespect of women. Dr. Farkhonda shared some examples of sexual harassment, such as the girl who would be molested by a group of young men while she leaves school, or that she is even vulnerable to this behavior inside the school itself. This strips the young girl of any sense of security and deepens her fear of being blamed by her family, as though it were her fault. Another example she shared was about the woman who is subjected to sexual harassment at her

work. She either remains silent and painfully deals with the matter or refrains from any interactions and becomes isolated. All these factors diminish the rights of women. She added that although the defenders of women's rights are a minority, there exist other obstacles and hindrances that squander these rights because there is no legal title protection, which motivates the National Council for Women (NCW) to call for an amendment to the penal code in order to address the problem of sexual harassment and violence, specifically rape. Under Article 17 of the penal code, the judge is allowed to lessen the penalty and sentence to a few months, in addition there are instances where the verdict or sentence is never carried out and is suspended. The NCW proposed another article that criminalizes sexual harassment, which depends on the new technology. Hence, we appeal to the civil society organizations to combine efforts with us so that we can voice our concerns to the authorities and decision makers.

It is impossible to overlook the role of the state in this regard, being the key player in combating this crime. It is perceived that there are major drawbacks and complacency, especially with regards to police presence on the streets and the status of security and safety. Things are obviously different from the past, and it is imperative that the labor law be revisited with the objective of ensuring that certain clauses are present in the law to address the crime. It is equally important to discuss at length this draft law and equip police stations with hotlines to report harassment crimes, provided that the police appoint women to receive the phone calls from the victims.

Furthermore, it is important to note that combating sexual harassment is a joint effort and is not solely the state's responsibility. Contrarily, it is the duty of the family to responsibly raise their children and produce generations of respectful people. This can also be complemented by the role of civil society and NGO's, which carry the burden of countering the entrenched anti-women attitudes in the society. We need to focus as well on the role of religious institutions, being

mosques or churches, because at this particular moment we need to stand up together and put these dimensions into the spotlight in order to create a favorable shift towards women.

The next speaker was Dr. Ziad Rifai, of the country representative of UNFPA in Egypt. He stressed that violence against women is a direct consequence of a lack of gender justice. Many programs adopted have called for the elimination of violence against women and combating this phenomenon is not solely restricted to one country. Rather, violence is prevalent in all countries and is related to current legislation and legal measures. A study was conducted by ECWR indicating that women of all ages and social backgrounds are subject to sexual harassment, and that this causes various psychological and social repercussions. Therefore, we have to change the social perception that women are inferior, and we urge that appropriate measures be taken for the sake of widening partnerships and alliances with non-governmental organizations, as well as proposing the required relevant legislation and solutions.

Among the participants, Swedish Ambassador Ms. Malin Kärre, noted that most of women are vulnerable to sexual harassment regardless of their religious identity or background of the criminal, as it is a phenomenon that is found everywhere. In that sense, we are in dire need to develop the relevant laws that seek the reduction of its magnitude and work for its full elimination. The honorable Kärre commended Egypt for having lots of proposals put in place to enhance legislation. She also appreciated the efforts made by the civil society and its active and dynamic role in changing the culture that places blame on the female victims for the crimes of others. Finally, she underlined the importance of the conference concluding its proceedings by studying legal loopholes and establishing a number of recommendations that we all wish to present to decision makers and authorities, whether governmental or not, in order to celebrate the success of the conference in making a big change.

At the outset of the conference proceedings, all participants agreed to the conceptual and practical challenges of studying this phenomenon. Despite the prevalence of sexual harassment at the international, regional and national levels, the international community has yet to come reach a consensus on a unified definition and be guided by an international agreement in addressing the problem. The European Union (EU) openly announced that it is not capable of coming up with a unified definition, but it can assist countries to develop standards and adopt legislation that fits their context. To this, some participants began to wonder if sexual harassment was associated with women? Answering this inquiry, experts pointed out that harassment is primarily associated with human dignity. Man, above all other creatures, is the only one divinely bestowed with an elevated position and is entrusted by God on earth. Man's dignity is closely linked to the means of his survival, his right to work in a clean environment, his own feeling that he lives in an environment that promotes equity and equal opportunity.

Indicators and studies, including one released by the EU, have shown that between 40 – 50% of women are sexually harassed in their work places. Furthermore, one out of every two or three women is susceptible to sexual harassment in the workplace compared to one out of every ten men.

In light of the social analysis behind harassment crimes, some experts took the floor. Among these experts was Dr. Sherifa Zuhur, Director of the Institute of Middle Eastern, Islamic and Strategic Studies in the USA. She addressed the reasons behind the rising rates of violence against women, confirming that this can be ascribed to the social and cultural pressures that surround women, which encourage them to remain silent. In addition, there is ignorance and a lack of awareness in dealing with others disrespectfully, as well as raising children with methods that further entrench violence among individuals. There are also some deep rooted thoughts inherited by the culture inherited, a

way of thinking that is laden with a pre-Islamic or a jahiliya sense of discrimination between males and females. In addition there are economic causes which force the woman to succumb to violence because she cannot afford to support herself and her children. And there is also the institutional violence practiced by governments and authorities.

Ms. Amal Basha, Director of the Arab Sisters Forum for Human Rights in Yemen highlighted the prevalence of sexual harassment in Yemen. For instance 90% of women have been victims of harassment, and the claims as to why they are harassed is based on the way they look, smell and act, which entices men harass them. 99% of women wear the niqaab and are fully covered and this modesty in appearance protects them? On the contrary, one may find that men, with their ostentatious looks, are more apt for harassment than women, as it is customary for men to wear kohl and henna and care about appearance more than women. However, it is the norm in mosques that preachers focus their Friday sermons on cursing women, describing them as immodest and unchaste.

In her intervention, Dr. Zainab Badr-el-din Mohamed, the chairwoman of “the mentor organization for research and training” in Sudan, pointed out the inaccurate stereotype of women that is being perpetuated by visual media in the Arab region. Dramas, for instance, reenact the patriarchal model, in addition to the current trend of using discriminatory examples, which portray women as dependent creatures whose role in life is confined to reproduction. Also, there is a connection between sexual harassment and power structure, as in Arab societies men are generally more powerful, and the younger sister is the one who has to take care of her brothers and cater to their needs. This produces young men who carry with them this culture and look down on their sisters and women in their lives as being more vulnerable creatures who are meant to bring pleasure to men’s lives. If it occurs that she shares a harassment incident, then she is to

blame, whereas the real culprit will go on unpunished as a result of the absence of laws which criminalize these acts.

Ms. Aljawhara Mohammed El-Wably, Chairwomen of the King AbdulAziz

Female Charity Association of Saudi Arabia commented that the rates of sexual harassment are much higher in stricter and more closed societies, which completely segregate between the two genders and are also dissolute and decadent. However, in our communities the problem lies in considering sexual harassment a taboo subject, which you are not permitted to discuss in public because it is shamefully kept a secret. Thus, there are usually no clear statistics available on this phenomenon, as it is categorized as being a quiet matter. It is even ironic when the society is infuriated if such major issues are highlighted or brought to attention in order to study and consider. In conclusion, she added that the subject was tackled by some discussions and some of the reasons that were provided included the revealing outfits some women wear, meanwhile others attributed this to the increasing rates of poverty. In actuality, all these reasons could possibly lead to this phenomenon, although none could provide a valid justification.

Dr. Helen Rizzo, Director of the Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology and Egyptology Department at the American University in Cairo, noted that most of the social literatures on the subject, which are subdued due to despotic regimes, focus on the effectiveness of protests in creating change within the regime or threatening it. However, there remains limited information available concerning the emergence of a routine form of protest, or an effective form of political participation in a tyrannical environment, which may not be targeting the state. She also presented her analysis and insights on the campaign launched by the Egyptian Center for Women Rights (ECWR) against sexual harassment. She relied on data provided through monitoring participants and stakeholders since November 2006 until 2008. Interviews were conducted with organization staff,

as well as an analysis of ECWR's literature. Findings show that the campaign has been successful, for a clear framework was developed to confront the issue and a clear strategy was established.

In his intervention, Dr. Ray Jureidini, Director of the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies at the American University in Cairo (AUC), outlined that sexual harassment is a form of social violence, especially targeting the working woman. Domestic maids are an example, as they are denied their rights under law that are applicable in many other countries, to the extent that maids are not treated equally as other female workers in other fields, which is especially true for foreign maids. They are mistreated and enslaved in the household and there is a prevalence of various forms of violence, ranging from harassment to rape. Laws in countries such as Lebanon or Egypt do not include domestic work in the labor law, as maids are considered informal workers, and are often accused of being spies who share secrets of the household. Therefore, it is imperative to make legal changes that address the problem of sexual harassment, particularly when it is work-related or rampant among informal domestic workers, for it is imperative that we prosecute these criminals.

Gender and violence expert, Ms. Samah Said, affirmed that society has double standards that promote societal discrimination against women and upholds the suppression of women within the patriarchal model. She also perceives that the inherited cultural and religious views have their share in the continued sufferings of and discrimination against women, where her only regret is that she was born a female. Therefore, the media and religious institutions must be involved in this issue, and women should be encouraged to reject this behavior and go to the police to have the criminal found, but first she should feel that the law would be enforced.

Amina Shafeek, journalist and gender expert at the NCW, tried to dismantle the concept of women's protection and the risk that it

may lead to her isolation, resulting in a stark backwardness and social regression. She addressed a number of crimes that violate women rights under the pretext of protection, such as female genital mutilation (FGM) or depriving women of the right to learn or work. Mrs. Amina then posed a question: “is it possible to protect women by segregating them from the society?!” In her response, she said that this is extremely difficult, as women over fifty years old proved their strength and ability in the field of education and work, yet they are still discriminated against based on their gender, as this often happens in more traditional societies. Thus, segregation is not related to protection by any means, it is not protection to merely isolate women and imprison them in the home, as though they are a private property of their family because an inevitable consequence is a total collapse of the society. Women account for half the population – in any society – meaning that women make up half of the human capacity and when women’s opportunities are diminished, the whole of society will suffer. To provide protection is to offer women the sense of security and safety everywhere, and by enacting relevant laws and regulations that are effective in confronting these violations as well as instilled mutual respect between men and women.

Amel Fahmy, a researcher in the Institute for Gender and Women Studies (IGWS) at the American University in Cairo (AUC), also focused her intervention on the concept of women’s protection in addition to the cultural legacy that continues today. She highlighted the importance of correcting these faulty traditions, which have entrenched in them the use violence against violence. Equally as important is changing the direction and modifying educational textbooks that perpetuate a stereotype of women, whereas it is more useful if they present a role model, which would greatly help produce a new generation brought up on respecting women. We are also in need of reconsidering the concept of citizenship as a substitute for protection in almost all Arab countries, meaning that women should be seen and considered full and eligible citizens. This would be the

responsibility of educators to change the mindset of individuals as an intrinsic prelude to changing societal trends. Textbooks should be designed in a scientific way according to a holistic and homogenous approach in order to be able to surmount the disparities and differences which portray women differently and cause great confusion in the minds of young generations.

Ms. Zeinab Radwan, Vice President of the People's Assembly, Egypt underlined the significance of deeply rooted religious beliefs in the hearts and minds of our children at a very tender age, adding that the deficiency in morals is due to the absence of a religious influence. She cited some examples from the prophet's teachings, (Sunnah) as evidence of the prohibition of crossing the line with women, humiliating them or depriving them of their due rights, in that she mentioned that one time a man went to see Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and he said, "Oh messenger of Allah, I am lustful and I can not glance a woman without exceeding my limit with her, so the Prophet replied, "would you accept this to happen with your mother, he said no, so he continued, "would you accept it to happen with your wife?, he again said no, then the Prophet said, would you accept it to happen with your sister, he replied no, "then finally he (pbuh) said, "should you accept this to happen with any of those, then you may accept it on yourself"?

Mona Ezzat, a researcher at the New Woman's Association in Egypt presented the findings of a study conducted on sexual harassment in the workplace, which briefly tackled the following: work environment circumstances, cultural, social and ethical reasons, professions which are often regarded as inferior (such as secretaries), female workers who live alone and the interpretation that they would accept indecent behavior, poor economic conditions and high costs of marriage that cause men to act indecently. As for the effect of sexual harassment on female workers, it is noticed that the victim feels guilty and responsible for being the subject of harassment because of her social situation.

She feels ashamed, frustrated, humiliated, fearful and insecure, and eventually she would begin isolating herself from her colleagues, whether males or females. Also there is the impact of the work conditions and relations, which compromise the position of female workers and deny them the right to defend themselves, as most of them are employed without contracts or on a temporary basis and are not covered by protection of a trade union. Some of the interviewed females also stated that it is more safe for them if they have other female colleagues around and if they avoid being alone with men, and it is seen as commendable if they leave their factory in groups as an example and minimize their conversations with male workers.

On the legal aspect, participants presented significant papers that thoroughly discuss how the issue of sexual harassment is legislatively addressed in different countries. Experts suggest that sexual harassment is not given sufficient attention by the law, as well as by international agreements and conventions that address various forms of violence against women, except for sexual harassment. Therefore, experts attempted to introduce a definition that may assist lawmakers to develop appropriate punitive and legislative measures.

Lawyer and human rights activist, Azza Al-Maqhoor, from Libya addressed the problem and stated that under Libyan labor law #58 approved in 1970 is completely void of the term sexual harassment. She continued to say that sexual harassment, whether verbal, non-verbal or physical, should be incorporated into the provisions of the criminal code to be punishable under the law. She highlighted that forms of sexual harassment vary, but the most common and frequent examples are verbal, as they often occur in closed places (at work or places of study). Under Libyan law, sexual harassment is not addressed by article #408 (indecent assault) or by article #421 (disgraceful acts). Accordingly, the harasser would remain free without any criminal prosecution or punishment according to Libyan law. Then Dr. Azza inquired: "Should we allow the harasser the opportunity to go further

in his misconduct until it becomes something punishable under the law meanwhile a smaller crime is permissible in a society that is inclined to remain silent under the pretext of protecting human honor and chastity?! Or should the legislator interfere to stop this criminal before he goes further and his crime becomes more severe?”

Mrs. Al-Jawhara Al-Waily discussed the way women are punished if they are convicted of committing a crime in addition to the bylaws of the Girls Care Association. As for the punitive system, she stated that any act that harms a woman’s character, property or honor is prohibited, and this extends to her home and private life. However, female victims should not seek any conviction and isolate themselves from ambiguous situations. However, these regulations are flexible and instead place the blame on the woman because she “isolates herself from ambiguous situations,” as she lacks any real security.

From the University of Qatar, Dr. Kaltham Al-Ghanem noted that it is true the law provides for very strict punishment against rapists, or the perpetrator of an act that harms the modesty of a female or endangers her life. Also, the law prescribes that females are only to be inspected by females and in the presence of other women. However, there still remains many hidden discrepancies. For example, there are no laws related to domestic violence and violence against women, in the sense that not a single clause or article defines or criminalizes acts of domestic violence, such as battery or denying them their lawful rights. There are also differences, which indicate blatant gender discrimination, such as the variation in applying punishment for crimes of indecent assault, as there are varying levels of punishments based on the degree of assault, although in the end all forms are contemptible.

In order to combat violence against women and children, revisiting legal provisions is necessary. Laws must incorporate measures that criminalize violations, help victims, and also prosecute convicts.

From the United States, Ms. Lakshmi Anantnarayan, the Communications Director at the international organization “Equality NOW” suggested a few points that the law should apply in order to combat sexual harassment, as well as the importance of employing international mechanisms. For instance, converting international agreements and conventions into tangible rights, would better facilitate keeping countries accountable to human rights standards. These mechanisms would help create a holistic program of action that is capable of rating governments from best to worst in terms of adhering to these agreements, in addition to using the international framework to clearly define problems and create a plan of action. However, practically speaking, this may be challenging, as protocols and conventions are primarily defined and developed by men and according to specific frameworks. Most often the focus is on broad issues such as human rights’ violations or political rights, as opposed to social or economic rights, and less popular problems are rarely addressed. Further, governments typically justify the existence of some discriminatory legal articles, such as family laws, nationality law, physical safety, freedom of expression, and freedom of mobility on the basis of culture, religion or race. Then she asked, “What do we really expect from human rights law?” While this law fails to grant women equality, we have to attach greater importance to thinking about the most effective ways in which we utilize these frameworks as a means to realize women’s rights.

In this regard Mr. Abdullah Khalil, lawyer and human rights activist, presented a definition of ‘violence against women’ and how it is addressed by international conventions. The forms of violence include domestic, physical, psychological and economic violence, as well as sexual harassment and rape, honor crimes, murder because of dowry, inflicting sexual harm, early marriage...etc. Violence against women can be classified as a matter related to human rights, acknowledging that it is a breach of human rights and clarifying the obligations that

countries and the international community are required to take in order to prevent violence and prosecute criminals. Therefore, in the case of complacency or failure to fulfill these commitments, countries must be held accountable accordingly. In this regard, states may be requested to take all necessary measures and procedures that combat the violence women experience. Furthermore achieving human rights for all will become more achievable when women themselves become involved with their own expertise and perspective. However, if women remain silent, then it will be difficult to understand the true nature of these violations and the necessary means to correct them. Thus, it is important that human rights efforts take into consideration the special circumstances of women.

Once a state ratifies a certain agreement or convention, it must be immediately accountable under international law for any violation of its provisions, even at the national level. The state is even obliged to apply the constitutional and legal procedures that ensure the agreement is enforced and that it is integrated into the national legal system, and that its respective laws do not contradict the provisions of the international agreement. Civil society has a role to play in this connection, especially with the international community. There are international and local campaigns that are launched to combat violence. In this sense, Dr. Abdallah noted that advocacy efforts are significant as well as steps taken to define violence, applying innovative tools such as theatre, drama, monitoring, publications, television, radio, internet, etc. However, unless men are involved in the struggle, then our advocacy efforts will not be successful. There are a few examples of promising coalitions where men tend to address the need for putting an end to the society's disregard for violence against women and in turn these men often pay tribute to the roles held by pioneering female figures.

Mrs. Nour El-Imam, lawyer and human rights activist, talked about the legal amendments in Jordan pertinent to violence against

women, stating that the approval of the law on domestic violence was a significant first step in the region. A number of laws were suggested for an amendment with the aim of eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women. In 2007, the CEDAW agreement was published in the official newspaper after fifteen years since the country's ratification, in order to become an integral part of the Jordanian legislature and now serves as a guiding reference for the judiciary. It is a well-known fact that an act of sexual harassment can happen anywhere, whether in the street, school, university, work, or even at home, yet the legislature did not criminalize these acts in a unified law. However, relevant articles were distributed over a number of laws, most notably within the penal code, domestic violence law and labor law. Sexual harassment is labeled as, "an indecent act which desecrates modesty, indecent assault, rape, seduction" according to the relevant laws.

With regards to the domestic violence law, it intends to find solutions and alternative punishment for violent domestic acts, with the purpose of preserving family links and minimizing the implications of criminal procedures. In addition to the introduction of new punishment and measures that address domestic violence, the legal protection for women working in agriculture and households has been improved under the revised labor law of 2008. These informal sectors are now covered by its provisions after being excluded for a long time and after witnessing numerous cases of sexual harassment towards maids without any legal protection.

Mrs. Faiza El-Basha, Executive Director of the Libyan Center for Human Rights discussed the use of the term "sexual harassment", which may indicate a certain seductive behavior that intends to induce immoral acts as a prelude to the crime of fornication (adultery), rape, homosexuality or assault on honor. Also, it connotes that this indecent behavior would arouse the desires of the victim in such a way that it harms his/her right to privacy. Sexual harassment is not defined under Libyan law however a clause was adopted to address the act of

harassing women in general, providing for some legal provisions that criminalize these acts, which compromise morality, honor or chastity. Sexual harassment, she added, is addressed by the law of indecent act, and it is described under article #420 of the penal code, which penalizes every word, action or insinuation that occurs in a public space and which victimizes the woman.

Mrs. Faiza called for the legislature to become more involved in criminalizing acts of sexual harassment, which are manifested in the form of disgraceful acts, even if they do not occur in public, or by publishing pornographic items. She further stressed the importance that the punishment must be stricter for child molesters or harassers of the mentally ill. The punishment should be even more severe if the victim is a child below the age of fourteen, or incapable of understanding what the criminal does to him/her, or if his illness prevents him from defending himself, or if he is forced and overwhelmed by the criminal's physical strength.

Mrs. Mary Zalzal, a human rights activist from Lebanon, cited CEDAW and various international agreements and laws that criminalize sexual harassment throughout the Arab region, affirming that violence, particularly physical violence has not been enforced enough by international conventions, despite the general principles, which served as the foundation for the inception of these conventions. A shift occurred after the Vienna conference and particularly in the aftermath of CEDAW's issuance in 1993.

With regards to sexual harassment, it is noted that the majority of Arab states' laws are lacking provisions that clearly state sexual harassment is a crime. However penal codes include articles that can be as applied to harassment cases. But female victims of sexual harassment rarely file a complaint, and if they actually do file a complaint, then they usually withdraw it because they will not be protected under the law. In some countries there are specific provisions, but it is subject to hearsay and is difficult to prove, resulting in criminals escaping

punishment. Meanwhile, the victim would face a heavy burden of speaking about her private life in public, whether during investigative procedures or in the courtroom. Furthermore, the Lebanese labor law does not address sexual harassment. When one of the judges was questioned about this he expressed his astonishment that in all the cases he reviewed there was no reference to harassment, yet he was able to detect the hidden reasons behind the filed lawsuits. Mrs. Mary concluded by proposing some legal articles dealing with sexual harassment along with a new draft criminal code.

Mrs. Zahra Fouad, a lawyer in the supreme higher council, and Deputy Director of the “Bridges Association for Women” in Morocco presented her working paper focused on the study of legal files as a means to analyze the status quo. She discovered from her lengthy survey that almost all the files, which are submitted to the courts or in a hearing, are directly attributed to poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and the inferior status of women, adding that the state did not offer the female victims with a special kind of legal protection. Also, there has not been independent or responsible educational media developed, nor social workers or psychiatric specialists placed in police stations or attorney general’s office, despite the fact that 80% of the victims are minors.

The role of media and civil society could influence the way sexual harassment is handled through raising awareness and combating of violence:

Dr. Iqbal Al-Amir Al-Samalooty, Dean of the Higher Institute for Social Services in Egypt, attempted to explore the future situation, pointing out the imbalance in the ethical system for many reasons, and so it is important to put an end to this growing problem and form alliances among civil society organizations to lobby at decision makers. NGOs should dedicate ad hoc offices that provide legal consultations, psychological and social assistance, and training for staff on how to receive and handle complaints. She also highlighted

the importance of cooperating with media and developing a strategy to launch awareness raising campaigns, organize competitions and activities for youth, produce soap operas, advertisements and motion pictures that tackle the phenomenon, design posters and leaflets to be distributed in metro stations and public places, condemning this behavior. In addition, the media should focus on the sufferings of young girls when they are subject to sexual harassment. Finally, it is important to raise the awareness of the general public about the values of masculinity and respect for women.

In addition, NGO's work should further involve families, reaffirming the role of the family as principally raising children and producing capable generations meanwhile stressing a culture of respect between parents and their siblings. Families must confirm that there is no difference between how girls or boys are treated inside the family, promoting the concept of Gender rather than Sex. Victims need to be made fully aware of how to deal with a an incident of sexual harassment, and girls are to be instilled with a sense of courage that compels them to disclose if they experience sexual harassment, stressing to them that a girl who remains silent does not respect herself.

Universities and schools should also play a significant role in raising awareness about the issue, since youth are mostly targeted. It is important to release bulletins and leaflets and disseminate them in schools along with encouraging extra-curricular activities at school. It would also be effective to dedicate one day for students to practice their most favored hobbies and interests and share their opinions and ask their questions, with the help and support of social workers, which guide the students to solve their problems. On the other hand, universities in all governorates should take awareness raising measures, with a focus on teaching sex education that enlightens children and teenagers about the subject and protects them later on from falling victim to crimes.

Finally, there is a need to conduct widespread studies and researches, which tackle the different aspects: economic, social, psychological, legal, etc., and which speaks about the repercussions and implications of sexual harassment on society in general, and women in particular.

Media figure and human rights activist, Magy Oun from Lebanon, addressed the fact that the Lebanese law disregards the issue of sexual harassment. Also, legal experts have formed a consensus that the Constitution clearly guarantees gender equality, yet there is a disagreement about what constitutes a bodily violation, as we do not find articles banning sexual harassment in the penal code.

When the law overlooked providing this protection for women, some feminist organizations took it upon themselves to put pressure in order to amend some discriminatory provisions under the penal code and introduce new protective laws. These organizations also endeavor to promote awareness among citizens on women rights inside schools and universities, and bring attention to the complaints of female victims.

Following this introduction, Mrs. Oun talked about the way violence is presented in the media, and although the media enjoys a reasonable amount of freedom, it does not address violence in an acceptable way, given that this issue is not considered a priority by media institutions. Like the majority of countries in the region, the media in Lebanon is faced with diverse challenges and impediments. Foremost among these challenges are professional, social and legal constraints, which impede media staff. For example, media professionals do not accurately represent women or reflect a human rights culture. In addition, there is the impediment of equipping media persons with reliable sources of information and precise scientific data that addresses cases of violence against women.

Mrs. Aisha Rashed, lawyer and Chairwoman of the Legal Committee in the UAW, tackled sexual harassment from a different angle, regarding it as a form of “terrorism” used against women, and which is considered a the taboo subject. On the other hand, sexual harassment can be linked to the spread of corruption and the absence of monitoring in the Arab world, (i.e. financial and administrative corruption that is rampant inside our institutions and that leads to some extent to moral corruption, especially that most of the recorded cases of harassed women at work indicate that this is practiced by male superiors, due to their powers, authority and influence) besides the total absence of monitoring or oversight. There are some recent calls to seclude women, and such claims only lower the status of women and regard women from the biological or rather sexual dimension only, with a disregard for their human, political, social and economic aspects. Media, in her view, is a double-edged sword that contains positive and negative aspects. Having said this, an effort must be exerted to improve and enhance the role of the media when it presents and evaluates the different forms and manifestations of sexual harassment.

In light of the experience of sharing the efforts of civil society organizations to confront sexual harassment:

Mrs. Abeer Al-Barbary, a professor of psychology at the American University in Cairo, made a valuable contribution by presenting an accurate analysis based on her academic monitoring. She spoke about the phenomenon and its magnitude, its adverse impacts, and then moved onto the Egypt experience with a special focus on the civil society, which is relentlessly attempting to come up with reasonable solutions to this growing problem through conducting discussions, launching campaigns, preparing studies, etc., and by employing the different weighty mass media channels that may contribute to treating the issue. Some of the solutions envisaged include changing the status of women in both the public and private life, attempting to break the cycle of silence, and divulging the facts to people and decision makers, and urging women to report incidents. She presented the campaign,

“Safe Streets for All”, which was launched by ECWR, as exemplary of campaigns which target social change.

Mr. Maged Al-Eissy, Head of the Medical and Social Services section at the family safety program in Saudi Arabia (KSA), discussed without reservation his working paper on cases of women who have experienced sexual harassment in Saudi Arabia. He pointed out that although there are attempts to underestimate the severity of the problem or ignore the rate of occurrence. There is a competition between electronic media and other forms of audio visual and published media in revealing the severity of sexual harassment against Saudi women. He described the various types of harassment at work places, in public places, places of recreation, education institutions, as well as via the electronic web, which all confirm that the rate of sexual harassment continues to soar, yet harassment in the work place is still limited, due to gender segregation (except for the health sector).

Despite its infrequency in the workplace, there remain many transgressions, especially when we look to the street or public spaces, which are not easily controlled. Thus, women do not usually prefer to walk alone, otherwise they will be vulnerable to experiencing sexual harassment. With regards to incest, some preliminary and limited data demonstrating that sexual molestation and assault account for 10% of domestic violence cases during the age of childhood. What happens to young girls through the Internet is worthy of discussion, since the criminal is able to hide his true identity and therefore enjoys committing these acts without fear of punishment. The media has a very major role to perform in this regard, and we take the example of the electronic media and public opinion chat rooms, which helped detect acts in the past few years and sought to mobilize public opinion against these offences. Also, the media has an important role in monitoring any slowdown in the enforcement of appropriate punishment, calling for more severe punishment, as was the case with the well known incident of Al-Nahda tunnel or the call that was made to appeal against rulings, which incorporated against the victims of assault or rape, as occurred in the popular case of Al-Qateef girl.

In conclusion, Dr. Maged stressed the importance of promoting sexual awareness at home and school, starting at a young age for both genders, drawing upon the holy Quranic verse: “Tell the believing men to lower their eyes and guard their private parts. There is for them goodness in this. God is aware of what they do”, verse 30, An-Nour (Light).

Following deep and insightful deliberations, the conference crowned its success by announcing a declaration, which confirmed the desire of everyone present to continue the effort of combating sexual harassment in the region, highlighting the success of the “Safe Streets for All” campaign in removing the “taboo” nature of sexual harassment and the right of women to express freely their opinions about the violations they experience. The declaration, however, made it clear that only through team work and concerted efforts this serious problem may be curbed.

In light of all the above, we are presenting to our readers this Declaration and the essence of the conference proceedings, springing from our desire to promote awareness and pressure lobbyists to help us eliminate this phenomenon of violence against women in general, with a particular focus on sexual harassment, in the hopes that this event would be just a beginning for a new phase of synergy and joint action on women’s issues.

Nehad Abul Qomsan
Egyptian Center for Women Rights

*The Cairo Announcement
For an Arab Society
Free from Sexual Harassment*

The male and female participants discussed sexual harassment as a social violence and various methods to achieve the enactment of laws in order to confront the use of violence that is committed in the Arab societies. The attendants exchanged experiences from their own countries in the field of combating societal violence, particularly with regards to sexual harassment. In addition, they highlighted methods to develop coordination between the Arab NGOs in order to foster cooperation.

The regional conference participants agreed to release this announcement:

The participants of the regional conference (“Sexual Harassment as Social Violence and its Impacts on Women in the MENA Region”) perceives legislation that seeks to promote human rights stems from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights passing by the international era of political and civil rights, the international era of economic, social and cultural rights and CEDAW, the announcement of the elimination of violence against women, and the African announcement of human rights, they all include articles that provide protection for women, the issue of harassment provides them a special care as it’s considered a direct violation to women’s rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) confirmed in the first article, “All people are born free”. Furthermore, it defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”

According to article 2 of the Declaration, “Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the

- household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
2. Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
 3. Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.”

However, the phenomenon of sexual harassment is similar in all Arab societies and it remains difficult to minimize its occurrences. As sexual harassment increases, it has negative effects on development efforts as well as social, economic and political justice efforts.

However, the participants posed the issue of sexual harassment as a social violence in the conference which is a new scientific approach. Prior to the conference, we continuously posed this social problem as the result of our families. Our Arab societies, refused to admit that there is a problem or present it as a social problem that requires common efforts to confront it, but we did not have the courage to confront sexual harassment nor the tools. The participants have agreed to be open and transparent in confronting this issue, and are willing to exert more effort to solve this problem in order to provide our societies with a more transparent and open phase where our societies are free from societal violence and free from sexual harassment against women in particular.

While the participants discussed the sexual harassment of women as a form of social violence, they also understood it is important that Arab societies seek the achievement of human and economical development simultaneously. Development cannot be achieved by the continuation of subjugating women to insult and injury, whether physical or verbal. In addition, the participants perceive that the prosperity of women's economic activities which contributes to Gross Domestic Product within every society that depends integrally on working and transportation environments that are free from the phenomenon of sexual harassment. The economic progress of women depends on a working environment

which is free from violence and harassment.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, indicated this when he noted that violence against women is a lucid violation to human rights as it impedes on social and economical development and prevents women to actively participate in development. Thus violence against women impedes on the realization of the thirg millennium development goals, which were agreed to in early 2000 and if applied, women will benefit as much as nations will.

In addition, combating sexual harassment and social violence against women is inherently linked to values of humanity and genuine Arab values.

We recognize that the mission of combating violence against women is a difficult one; we believe that success will be based on the following steps which require full partnership and cooperation between the state, civil society organizations, society, the education system, media, cultural associations and religious leaders:

The Level of Legislation: Arab legislative councils must enact laws and measures that create punishment for those who use violence against women; legislation should guarantee that a woman's dignity and rights are protected.

1. Laws that deter public employees from refraining to release complaints or records with regards to complaints against any woman.
2. Measures to create a specialized department in police stations that are managed by policewomen in addition to psychological, social and legal specialists, who can receive women who have been violated or harassed.
3. Investigations and trials should remain private in addition to the timely implementation of court rulings in order to achieve the deterrent role of law and provide fair compensation.
4. The creation of a database to record cases of violence and harassment in order to be a base for studies and research approaches, so that the

society recognizes the improvements in this field. The information should be available for researchers.

5. Amend laws in order to criminalize the sexual harassment, especially sexual harassment in the workplace, and put a mechanism to facilitate its application.
6. Amend the Labor Law in a way that addresses harassment firmly and supports female workers.
7. Establish a legal guide that will help women understand the necessary procedures that should be taken in order to confront sexual harassment.

The Level of Security:

1. Security patrols are trained to help victims and prove incidents of violence, methods of inspections and protection like cameras and other methods of proof are utilized in order to reinforce the rights of the victim. Also, hotlines are to be established to receive the complaints of women who do not wish to mention their names so that society could recognize the biggest amount of violence cases as a step to develop the work of the state and civil society organizations in this field.
2. Fair implementation of the law for all individuals without differentiation under the name of citizenship.
3. Securing the streets of Arab countries by all possible security measures, whether by cameras or increasing the number of policemen, especially in occasions where many people gather.

The Level of Society:

1. Regarding the schools as nurturing institutions not only educational ones in order to use educational activities between boys and girls within the frame of literature and art activities so that they younger generations will become accustomed to social partnership.
2. The importance of the social specialist in schools and granting him the abilities to consider the problems of students and guide different ages of students.

3. Reproductive health education according to students age levels and the students' awareness of the human body to discuss issues like how to keep your body healthy, the difference between normal relations and those that violate others.
4. The necessity of cooperation with media to organize awareness campaigns and to create a media strategy that is media associations, syndicates and journalists' associations are committed to and that clarify that combating harassment and violence against women is beneficial to families' relations and childhood.
5. Cooperation with authors of television, cinema and radio dramas to explain the problem and its social and economic dimensions, so that the media campaign of resistance to institutional violence and sexual harassment against women would gain supporters from authors of Arab drama.
6. A training program for everyone who works or participates in fighting this problem, such as military police and female social and psychological service providers, to understand the dimensions of this problem completely, as it may be a result of a social or psychological disease.
7. Media confirmation on the role of families to raise children in a way that respects the body and mind of others, knows the methods of resistance and supports family members who have been subjected to violence, how to notify others, and guarantees to protect the privacy and dignity of individuals.
8. Publishing the conclusions of researches and highlighting them in media, not only in women's programs but in general programs, so that the audience will be widened to understand that institutional violence and sexual harassment are social issues not individual problems that may be embarrassing.

The Level of Religion:

1. Understanding the impact and role of religious speech, which is linked to societal problems despite moral solutions within religions.
2. Re-affirming the religious ideals of tolerance, respect and cooperation to build a firm family and an advanced and modern state.

The Level of Civil Society:

1. Cooperation with civil society organizations in every Arab country based on their level of partnership and common work between Arab CSOs on the regional level.
2. CSOs adoption of the issue of institutional violence and sexual harassment against women by training both men and women members on methods to confront the issue and combat it, focusing on the serious societal dimensions of these problems.
3. CSOs should have the liberty to help and work to combat institutional violence and harassment against women.
4. The CSOs exert increasing efforts to cooperate with youth as volunteers and use them in their campaigns to combat violence.
5. Male and female participants agreed to create a mechanism that guarantees constant and consistent monitoring of women's status in the Arab region, where monitoring of women's statuses should be done to evaluate the achieved progress in the field of combating violence against women especially sexual harassment, releasing annual reports, presenting analytic and scientific studies on the phenomenon of violence against women.

Suggestions:

After presenting the announcement and the recommendations of the conference, there were many suggestions and discussions that followed, such as:

1. Religious discourse should be changed because it portrays women merely as bodies.
2. Dedicating hotlines in order to receive complaints of sexual harassment and train those who are in charge about the effects of this problem in order to be qualified to treat different cases.
3. Teaching sex education as part of school curriculum.
4. It is necessary to train female social specialists, so they will be able to deal with the problems children face because the oral and religious discourses are not enough.
5. Establishing a network with all Arabs in order to monitor sexual harassment and conduct research on this phenomenon.

6. The number of police officers and security forces must be increased in the streets
7. From the legislative side, there must be fair application of the law, with no discrimination.
8. The person who commits sexual harassment must visit a psychiatrist and social specialist in order to receive treatment.
9. There must be a parallel between enacting laws criminalizing sexual harassment and compensating victims while at the same time enhancing the culture of equality and cooperation.
10. Enhancing the culture of human's rights and respect of honor.
11. Monitoring all the cultural elements that encourage sexual harassment, analyzing them, and setting strategies and programs to treat and better them.
12. Approving policies that protect people from sexual harassment, raising awareness and providing trainings, in cooperation with the relevant syndicates and ministries, especially the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.
13. Instantaneous protection of victims and witnesses.
14. Establishing "safe places" centers for victims in order to break the silence.
15. Setting policies and programs in order to enable women to face sexual harassment.
16. Approving means of support for victims and defending them in a fair way.
17. Encouraging syndicates to work on their priorities and approve the procedural punishments.
18. Encouraging women to obtain decision making positions in various syndicates in order to be able to put the issue of sexual harassment on top of its priorities.
19. Setting the bases of protection from sexual harassment and the procedural punishments in the inner systems of the public and private associations and the public contracts.
20. Encouraging the media to prepare programs and materials that expose and condemn sexual harassment, and to train media workers to tackle the issue legally, socially and economically.

*Agenda for the
Regional Conference on
«Sexual Harassment as Social Violence and its
Effect on Women»*

*Cairo, 13-14 December 2009
Intercontinental Hotel, City Stars*

First Day

Opening Ceremony (09:30 -10:30)

Inauguration speeches by:

Ms. Nehad Abu El Komsan, Chair of the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR)

Dr. Farkhonda Hassan, Secretary General of the National Council for Women (NCW)

Dr. Ziad Rifai, UNFPA Representative

Mrs. Malin Kärre, Ambassador of Sweden in Egypt

Animated movie "*A very Important Film*"



The Social Dimension

The First Session: Conceptualizations of Social Violence (10:30-12:00)

This session aims to conceptualize a framework for understanding social violence with a specific focus on violence that affects women in everyday life. In particular the session will address:

- The definition of social violence and its different forms
- Mechanisms of social violence
- The role of culture, media and other institutions in fostering social violence
- Role of the state with regards to social violence
- Exploitation of women's related issues within political discourses

Chairwomen	Azza Al Makhour – Lybian lawyer and activist
First Paper	Dr. Sherifa Zuhir, Director, Institute of Middle Eastern, Islamic and Strategic Studies, USA Ms. Amal Basha, Director of Arab Sisters Forum for Human Rights- Yemen Mrs. Samah Sa'eed, expert in the social gender and violence against women
Second Paper	
Third Paper	
Fourth Paper	Ms. Aljawhara Mohammed El-Wably, Chairwomen of the King AbdulAziz Female Charity Association, Saudi Arabia
Discussions	

12: 00 – 12:30 Tea Break

The Second Session: Conceptualizations of Sexual Harassment (12:30 –02:00)

This session aims to understand sexual harassment as a form of social violence, and problematic stereotypes of both the harasser and the victim. In particular this session will address:

- The definition of harassment and the different forms of sexual harassment in public space
- Interrogating stereotypes of the harasser and the victim
- The deeds that are considered to be of the sexual harassment
- Harassment in the work place: the case of migrant female domestic workers in Lebanon
- Sexual Harassment in the public places, its definition and examples

Chairwomen	Ms. Aljawhara Mohammed El-Wably, Chairwomen of the King AbdulAziz Female Charity Association, Saudi Arabia
First Paper	Dr. Ray Jureidini, Director of the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies at the American University in Cairo (AUC)
Second Paper	Ms. Zeinab Radwan, Vice President of the People’s Assembly, Egypt, and member of the National Council for Human Rights
Third Paper	Mrs. Mona Ezzat, The New Woman Association
Fourth Paper	Ms. Zeinab Badr El Deen Mohammad, Chair of the Organization of the Teacher is before All for trainings and researches (Elm), Sudan
Discussions	

2:00 – 2:30 Second Tea Break

The Third Session: Notions of Protection ... A means for freedom or Justification for restrictions (02:30-04:00)

This session aims to discuss the social, economic and political consequences of marginalizing women and denying their citizenship rights. The papers will explain how Protection Letter is spreading the idea of non-equality that is based on gender. In particular this session addressed:

- Women as representations of communal identity and social property
- Notions of protection in relationship to violent practices such as deprivation of education, discrimination in the paid labor force and/

- or female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Gender discrimination (The experience of Qatar)

Chairwomen	Ms. Amina Shafiq, Journalist and Gender Expert at the National Council for Women (NCW)
First Paper	Ms. Amel Fahmy, Institute for Gender and Women Studies (IGWS) at the American University in Cairo (AUC)
Second Paper	Mrs. Helen Rizzo, the Chair of the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology and Egyptology at the American University in Cairo
Discussant	
Discussions	

4:00 -5:00 Lunch

Second Day

The Legal Dimension

The First Session: International Law and Treaties: Do they meet needs and achieve justice (9:30 – 11:00)

This session aims to discuss the role of international law and treaties in influencing existing national laws and acting as a tool for social change. In particular this session will discuss:

- The role of international law and conventions in affecting national laws on violence against women
- National law as a tool for social change?
- The role of international mechanisms and campaigns in minimizing violence

Chairwomen	Ms. Zeinab Radwan, Vice President of the People’s Assembly, Egypt and member of the National Council for Human Rights
First Paper	Mr. Abdullah Khalil, lawyer in the court of Cassation and Counselor in the International Law for Human Rights, Egypt
Second Paper	Ms. Lakshmi Anantnarayan, Communications Director, Equality Now, USA
Third Paper	Kaltham Al Ghanem, Associate Professor of Sociology, Qatar University
Fourth Paper	Ms. Aljawhara Mohammed El-Wably, Chairwomen of the King AbdulAziz Female Charity Association, Saudi Arabia
Fifth Paper	Ms. Nour El-Emam, Lawyer and Human Rights Activist President of the People’s Assembly, Egypt

11:00 – 11:30 Tea Break

The Second Session: Legislations and their Applications in the Region (11:30 -01:00)

This session aims to discuss the situation in different countries in the Arab region with regard to national laws on sexual harassment. In particular, this session will discuss

- The legislative situation in Arab Countries: differences in the use of the term “sexual harassment” within existing national laws in different countries in the region
- The role of national social movements in advocating for, formulating or/and enforcing national laws on sexual harassment
- The role of national legislation and its enforcement in supporting women’s right and breaking the silence around sexual harassment

Chairwomen	Mrs. Al Zuhra Fourat – Lawyer accredited by the High Council, and the vice president of Josor Association the Forum of the Moroccan Women
First Paper	Ms. Nehad Abul Komsan, Chair of ECWR Ms. Faeza Basha, Ex. director of the Libyan Center for Human Rights – the program of protecting families for the women exposed to violence Azza Al Makhour – Lybian lawyer and activist Mary Rose Zalzal, Human Rights Activist, Lebanon
Second Paper	
Third Paper	
Fourth Paper	
Fifth Paper	Kaltham Al Ghanem, Associate Professor of Sociology, Qatar University Azza Al Makhour – Lybian lawyer and activist
Discussions	

1:00 -1:30 Tea Break

Civil Society Dimension

The Third Session: The Role of Civil Society in Eliminating Harassment (1:30 – 3:00)

The session:

Presented experiences of civil society organizations in different countries in the region in advocating against and combating sexual harassment.

- ◆ It also highlighted the role of the media role in raising awareness and contributing to anti-sexual harassment efforts.

Chairwomen	Dr. Ikbal Al Amir Al Smalouty, Dean of the Higher Institute for Social Service, and the head of Hawa'a Association
First Paper	Mrs. Al Zuhra Fourat – Lawyer accredited by the High Council, and the vice president of Josor Association the Forum of the Moroccan Women
Second Paper	Ms. Magui Oun, Media specialist and Human Rights Activist, Lebanon
Third Paper	Ms. Sabah El-Halak, Alliance of Syrian Women
Fourth Paper	Ms. Aisha Rashed, Chairwoman of Lawyers Committee, Emirates
Fifth Paper	Dr. Abier El Barbary, Professor of Psychology, American University in Cairo (AUC)
Sixth Paper	Mr. Maged Al Eissa, The Arab Republic of Saudi Arabia
Seventh Paper	Mr. Abdullah Khalil, Lawyer at the Court of Cassation, and Expert in the International Law for Human Rights, Egypt

Discussions

**The Closing Session: Recommendations and Moving Forward
(03:00 – 04:00)**

Chairwomen (Presenting the recommendations of the conference's statement)	Ms. Amina Shafiq, Journalist and Gender Expert at the National Council for Women (NCW) Ms. Nehad Abul Komsan, Chair of ECWR
Discussions	

4:00 – 4:30 Lunch

List of the Speakers

1. Ms. Aljawhara Mohammed El-Wably, Chairwomen of the King AbdulAziz Female Charity Association, Saudi Arabia
2. Mrs. Al Zuhra Fourat – Lawyer accredited by the High Council, and the vice president of Josor Association the Forum of the Moroccan Women, Morocco
3. Dr. Ikbal Al Amir Al Smalouty, Dean of the Higher Institute for Social Service, and the head of Hawa’a Association, Egypt
4. Ms. Amal Basha, Director of Arab Sisters Forum for Human Rights- Yemen
5. Ms. Amel Fahmy, Institute for Gender and Women Studies (IGWS) at the American University in Cairo (AUC)
6. Ms. Amina Shafiq, Journalist and Gender Expert at the National Council for Women ((NCW)
7. Dr. Ray Jureidini, Director of the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies at the American University in Cairo (AUC)
8. Dr. Ziad Rifai, UNFPA Representative
9. Ms. Zeinab Badr El Deen Mohammad, Chair of the Organization of the Teacher is before All for trainings and researches (Elm), Sudan
10. Dr. Zeinab Radwan, Vice President of the People’s Assembly, Egypt, and member of the National Council for Human Rights
11. Mrs. Samah Sa’eed, expert in the social gender and violence against women, Egypt
12. Dr. Sherifa Zuhir, Director, Institute of Middle Eastern, Islamic and Strategic Studies, USA
13. Ms. Sabah El-Halak, Alliance of Syrian Women, Syria
14. Ms. Aisha Rashed, Chairwoman of Lawyers Committee, Emirates
15. Dr. Abier El Barbary, Professor of Psychology, American University

- in Cairo (AUC)
16. Mr. Abdullah Khalil, lawyer in the court of Cassation and Counselor in the International Law for Human Rights, Egypt
 17. Azza Al Makhour – Lybian lawyer and activist, Libya
 18. Ms. Faeza Basha, Ex. director of the Libyan Center for Human Rights – the program of protecting families for the women exposed to violence, Libya
 19. Dr. Farkhonda Hassan, Secretary General of the National Council for Women (NCW)
 20. Dr.Kaltham Al Ghanem, Associate Professor of Sociology, Qatar University, Qatar
 21. Dr. Maged Al Eissa, The Arab Republic of Saudi Arabia
 22. Ms. Mary Rose Zalzal, Human Rights Activist, Lebanon
 23. Ms. Magui Oun, Media specialist and Human Rights Activist, Lebanon
 24. Mrs. Mona Ezzat, The New Woman Association, Egypt
 25. Mrs. Malin Kärre, Ambassador of Sweden in Egypt
 26. Mrs. Nehad Abul Komsan, the head of ECWR , Egypt
 27. Ms. Nour El-Emam, Lawyer and Human Rights Activist President of the People’s Assembly, Jordan
 28. Dr. Helen Rizzo, the Chair of the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology and Egyptology at the American University in Cairo
 29. Dr. Lakshmi Anantnarayan, Communications Director, Equality Now, USA