

This issue features:

Sexual violence in the political crisis in Egypt

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Impact of conflicts

EGYPT

Since the military coup in Egypt in July 2013, there has been a significant increase in the use of sexual violence by the security forces with the aim of suppressing the political opposition and preventing protests. This is one of the main conclusions of the report published by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), which detailed that the use of sexual violence is widespread during arrests and in detention centres, affecting members of the opposition to the government of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, but also demonstrators, NGO representatives and people accused of undermining moral order. Therefore, women, minors, students and members of LGTBI communities were victims of this abuse. The report states that women are often targets of abuse because they are regarded as repositories of collective identity in order to punish the communities to which they belong. Thus, women were reportedly abused during search operations and raids and detained arbitrarily to pressure families, while sexual violence was used against political prisoners and activists. According to sources close to the banned group Muslim Brotherhood

(MB) that appeared in the media, around 150 women linked to the MB were in prison and at least 20 cases of rape and some forced abortions had been reported. In addition, traditional abusive practices involving the use of sexual violence were committed against detainees and in police stations, but their growing prevalence in public spaces is related to the increasing presence of the police, military and security forces in public spaces (streets, road checkpoints, universities, etc.). The FIDH's report is based on interviews with victims, lawyers, human rights activists and NGO representatives and notes the difficulties in documenting this type of abuse due to the climate of persecution of NGOs, problems in contacting MB supporters and the stigma linked to sexual violence that hinders efforts to address it. The FIDH stressed the authorities' responsibility to prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish this form of violence, stating that even though the Egyptian president has announced that the struggle against sexual violence is one of his priorities, in practice an increase in these abuses has been observed against men and women in an atmosphere of impunity.

- FIDH, *Exposing State Hypocrisy: Sexual Violence by Security Forces in Egypt*, FIDH, 19 May 2015
- Al Jazeera, "Surge in sexual abuse by Egypt authorities, report says", *al-Jazeera*, 19 May 2015

UNITED NATIONS

A report released by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) in June noted that despite the organisation's efforts since 2003 to end exploitation and sexual abuse, which have resulted in an overall downward trend since 2009, complaints persist and transactional sex remains a very common and poorly investigated practice. In 2013 there were 66 reports, a slight increase from 60 the year before. Complaints involving minors represented over one third (36%) of the total from 2008 to 2013. Four missions saw the greatest number of complaints: the mission for the stabilisation of Haiti (MINUSTAH), the mission for the stabilisation of the DRC (MONUSCO), the mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the missions in Sudan (UNMIS) and South Sudan (UNMISS). The highest number of complaints involved military personnel, followed by civilians and police. While civilians only make up 18% of the missions' staff, they account for 33% of the complaints.

According to the report, under the 2007 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the countries contributing troops have primary responsibility for investigating misconduct by their military personnel. In addition, there have been countries that have not responded to the United Nations' requests for information about following up on these complaints and significant delays

in finishing the investigations have been reported by the OIOS (averaging around 16 months). Moreover, punishment is meted out with great variation, weakening the concept of zero tolerance promoted by the UN, as it ranges from the firing of civilian staff to the repatriation of military and police personnel, in addition to their disqualification from participating in peacekeeping operations in the future. Prison sentences are nearly exclusively given to military personnel, although their length is unknown. Finally, assistance for victims is a trickle, very few have received aid due to a lack of dedicated funding and the implementation process is slow. The organisation has received 480 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by members of peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions between 2008 and 2013, with South African troops facing the most accusations, followed by Uruguayans and Nigerians. Furthermore, despite the effort that established the report of the UN Secretary-General in 2003 to discourage transactional sex, research conducted on UN two missions (Liberia and Haiti) finds that transactional sex (sex in exchange for money, jewellery, mobile phones, televisions or food) between UN Staff and beneficiary populations is very common in both missions, though scarcely investigated.

- The Washington Post, "[U.N. peacekeeping and transactional sex](#)", 16 June 2015
- United Nations, "[United Nations peacekeepers commonly pay for sex - U.N. study](#)", Reuters, 10 June 2015
- OIOS, "[Evaluation of the Enforcement and Remedial Assistance Efforts for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by the United Nations and Related Personnel in Peacekeeping Operations](#)", 1 A/61/19/Part III endorsed by the General Assembly A/RES/61/26 B., 15 May 2015 (republished on 12 June)

CAR

UN Secretary-General spokesman Stéphane Dujarric announced that the UN peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) was accused of sexually abusing minors in the capital, Bangui. The abuse may have been committed in 2014, but MINUSCA was not informed of it until 19 June 2015. The UN was trying to verify the accusations and provide support to the victims. The UN has notified the African country to which the accused belong, giving it 10 days to state the measures to be undertaken to remedy the situation. Two 16-year-old girls were allegedly exploited sexually in exchange for food

and other products. The UN has indicated that it expects the country to open an investigation to determine who is responsible and has begun its own investigation into the events. Furthermore, a few weeks ago MINUSCA asked Morocco to investigate accusations of sexual abuse. The UN is coming under fire again for its handling of the alleged rape of a dozen children in the country by French soldiers during Operation Sangaris between December 2013 and June 2014. Last May, France announced that 14 of its soldiers face possible punishment for abuse committed in the Central African country.

- Jeune Afrique, "[Centrafrique : nouvelles accusations d'abus sexuels sur enfants par des Casques bleus](#)", 23 June 2015
- Jeune Afrique, "[Centrafrique : que sait-on de l'affaire des viols présumés d'enfants par des soldats français?](#)", 30 April 2015

TUNISIA

The Truth and Dignity Commission of Tunisia, which aims to document abuses in the country over the last 60 years, has collected many testimonies from women describing practices of extreme cruelty and episodes of sexual violence. Officially created in June 2014, the commission has a mandate to gather information about and investigate human rights abuses committed in Tunisia from 1955 (one year before achieving independence from France) until late 2013, including the regimes of Habib Bourguiba and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and the first two years of the transition. Most of the 12,000 testimonies collected in recent months have been provided by men, but women have begun to denounce some degrading practices even though it is a taboo subject in a social environment where women appear as the repository of family honour. The precedents suggest that many women were victims of torture as brutal as men and serious episodes of sexual violence as well, whether because they were activists (leftists, Islamists, trade unionists, students) or a dissident's family

member. The victims were attacked in their homes or in police stations in order to obtain information, as well as to dissuade them or their families from participating in opposition activities. Many were detained and interrogated without the mediation of a formal process, meaning there is no documented evidence, and suffered physical and psychological damage that still affect them today. Given the difficulties in testifying in these cases, mobile units have been created to facilitate the gathering of information and the commissioner for women of the Truth and Dignity Commission is travelling across the country to encourage many victims to testify. While general information on the abuse committed over the last six decades did exist, the commission's work is exposing the scale of the repression. The president of the Truth and Dignity Commission, Sihem Bensedrine, has said that women's abuse is greater than previously anticipated and highlighted the paradox of these acts in light of the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes' fame in promoting the rights of women.

- Carlotta Gall, “[Women in Tunisia Tell of Decades of Police Cruelty, Violence and Rape](#)”, *The New York Times*, 28 May 2015 and “[Torture Claims in Tunisia Await Truth Commission](#)”, *The New York Times*, 19 May 2015
- Francisco Peregil, “[Túnez revisa los crímenes de sus dictaduras](#)”, *El País*, 03 July 2015
- New York Times, “[Confronting the Past in Tunisia](#)”, *The New York Times*, 07 June 2015

Peacebuilding

CAUCASUS

Women civil society activists from the northern Caucasus, Ukraine, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh participated in the third regional conference organised by the Women's Initiative for Peace in the Caucasus and in the Armenian capital between 4 and 6 June under the title “The role of women in preventing conflicts and maintaining peace and security”. The meeting covered three main areas: “The world since 2014: war, conflict, terrorism and fragile peace and their impacts on women”; “The role of women in the security sector: myth or reality?” and “Implementation of Resolution 1325: from adoption to practice”. According to the organisers, the discussions addressed the political, religious, social and cultural pressure that falls on women during and after military actions. The delegation of Azerbaijan, which was also invited, could not attend due

to obstacles in travelling to Armenia in the context of the unresolved conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as Azerbaijani pressure on independent civil society. The year before, similar difficulties were faced by Azerbaijani women participating online. The coordinating committee of Women's Initiative for Peace in the Caucasus includes Democracy Today (Armenia), the Association for Protecting Women's Rights (Azerbaijan), the Women's Information Centre (Georgia), RSO Centre (Chechnya, Russia) and the Union of Volunteers of Stavropol (Stavropol, Russia). According to Caucasian Knot, the conference's participants proposed creating a Women's Council to promote women's participation in peace processes in the region. In addition to civil society, the representatives of some embassies in Armenia and of

some international bodies also participated. The purpose of the annual regional conference was to create a women's

platform for sharing lessons learned and form a network to support and empower women.

- Caucasian Knot, [“In Yerevan, conference participants propose to create Women's Council for peace talks”](#), CK, 9 June 2015.

The fragile peace process in Afghanistan

Peace negotiations between the Taliban insurgency and the Afghan government have gained new momentum in recent months and even though the progress is severely limited for the time being, some remarkable gestures have been made both for advancing the peace process and for the situation of Afghan women. After the formation of the new government led by Ashraf Ghani, some diplomatic contact was resumed and attempts were made to incorporate more actors into the process, like Pakistan and China. Throughout the rapprochement between the Afghan government and the Taliban, women's and human rights organisations have expressed their concern about the fragility of the progress in recognising women's rights and the risk that they are left out of a possible agreement between the parties. Since the fall of the Taliban regime, the situation of women in Afghanistan has experienced no significant change and although some rights were given formal recognition, the reality remained one of serious exclusion and discrimination in all areas, along with a severe impact of gender violence. Some mainly symbolic gestures were made following the formation of the new government led by President Ashraf Ghani that could indicate that it will be more committed to improving the situation of women in the country. Thus, a gesture that has been widely picked up by the media, especially internationally, was Ghani's direct recognition of his wife's work during his inaugural speech and the fact that she is actively engaged in advocating for the internally displaced population, something unprecedented in the political life of the country. Meanwhile, several women were appointed to political offices like governorships, in line with the election promises made by the new government. However, these appointments have been plagued by difficulties for various reasons, including the opposition of Parliament and problematic security conditions. Afghan women occupying positions of public importance are subjected to continuous threats and aggression, including murder.

But beyond the symbolic value of these gestures, a hitherto unprecedented event in the peace process in the country was the meeting held in Oslo between Taliban representatives and a delegation of nine women that included MPs, members of the High Peace Council and human rights advocates. The meeting was facilitated by the government of Norway as part of its support for the peace process in Afghanistan, but was not official in nature and was described as preliminary. The women did not participate as Afghan government representatives. Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid acknowledged that the multiple-day meeting had taken place, but said that the discussions were informal and could not be categorised as peace negotiations. Regardless of the degree of formality that that meeting may have had, its symbolic value cannot be denied because women's participation in formal peacebuilding efforts in Afghanistan has been greatly restricted by all parties involved. Alongside the gathering in Oslo, another direct meeting was held between Taliban and women as part of an informal gathering in Qatar organised by the Canadian organisation Pushwag Council, with the participation of an Afghan government delegation that included several women and a Taliban delegation. Former MP Malalai Shinwari, who attended the meeting of direct talks with the Taliban, said that they had referred to women's rights on various occasions, stating that they were not opposed to women's participation in politics, and the statement of the conclusions of the meeting said that all the attendees had stressed the importance of the right to education for men and women.

All these events and gestures took place amidst constant complaints about the severe impact of the armed conflict on Afghan women, as well as the alarming levels of violence, poverty and exclusion that they experience. Moreover, Afghanistan is still light years from any international standard on participation and respect for the rights of women. However, given the Afghan context, the initiatives could indicate that change is under way in the country that could lead to better living conditions for women over the long term. When the starting point is the almost total exclusion from public space and the lack of full respect for the most basic and fundamental rights, the first steps towards change are inevitably timid and fragile.

- The Associated Press, “Taliban members meet female Afghan lawmakers for unprecedented talks” *The Associated Press*, 5 June 2015
- Danish Karokhel, “Taliban not against women in politics: Shinwari” *Pajwhok*, 4 May 2015
- P. Cotta Ramusino, *Report of a 2 day Pugwash meeting on Security in Afghanistan*, *Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs*, 3 May 2015

CYPRUS

As part of the resumption of the formal negotiating process on the reunification of Cyprus in May, the political leaders of both communities on the island and their negotiating teams announced commitments and confidence-building measures that same month, including an agreement among the parties on the need to resolve the conflict, taking the perspectives of both men and women into account, as well as an agreement to create a committee on gender equality as part of the talks. At a joint meeting on 17 June, both Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı, who won the presidential election in April 2015, formulated the mandate for the new committee on gender equality and designated the participating individuals, according to the statement released that day by the UN Secretary-General's Special Advisor on Cyprus Espen Barth Eide, which did not elaborate on the content of the mandate or the appointment process. The people who will sit on the committee include Xenia Loizidou, Soula Zavou, Mary

Papadopoulou, Soula Hadjikyriacou, Helen Apegitou, Harris Chrysostom, Maria Hadjipavlou, Olga Demetriou and Nicolas Kyriacou. Days after the meeting on 17 June, the European Women's Lobby (EWL) expressed support for restarting the peace talks, but also warned that they have excluded adequate participation by women thus far and clearly lacked a gender perspective. The EWL urged the political leaders to guarantee that women make up 50% of the negotiating team and all technical and working committees, and to ensure that a gender perspective is incorporated and applied systematically throughout the process. Meanwhile, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security urged the UN Security Council to support efforts to ensure the full and substantive participation of women in the negotiating process through explicit references in the mandate of the UN mission in Cyprus. It also called on the UN offices in Cyprus to support the inclusion of women and a gender perspective.

- UN Good Offices Mission, *Statement delivered by Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on Cyprus Espen Barth Eide on Wednesday 17 June 2015*, 17 June 2015
- European Women's Lobby, “EWL calls on Cypriot leaders to include women on an equal footing with men in peace negotiation”, *EWL*, 19 June 2015
- NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, *Monthly Action Points. Women, Peace and Security*, July 2015

SENEGAL

The women of Casamance called on the Senegalese government and the armed group MFDC to apologise to the victims of the conflict and open a space for women in the peace negotiations. After a study that surveyed more than 630 people in the regions of Ziguinchor, Kolda and Sédhiou, the Plateforme de Femmes pour la Paix a Casamance, which brings together 170 associations, updated and presented a document with women's demands, urging equitable participation in the peace process to ensure that their specific needs are integrated into the agreements and respected, as well as greater representation in public decision-making. In order to lay the foundations for a durable peace, the women of Casamance

also demanded the restoration of the truth, recognition of mistakes made and formal apologies from both the government and the MFDC for the violence perpetrated against women. According to the report, women suffer from the conflict on three levels: as victims of that same abuse as men (abduction, torture, summary execution), as victims of serious aggression linked to the fact that they are women (rape, harassment, forced abortions) and as indirect victims as the mothers, daughters and wives of detained, dead or disappeared men. The Plateforme de Femmes pour la Paix a Casamance said that it prioritises taking steps to protect women against all forms of violence and adopt preventive policies, while also stressing that the

demining process is an urgent and indispensable condition for facilitating the return of people displaced by the conflict. In May, a demonstration of women's organisations from

Casamance and Guinea-Bissau was held in Guinea-Bissau to demand a larger role for women in the peace negotiations.

- APS, “[Crise casamançaise: des femmes exigent une place dans les négociations](#)”, APS in Sunuafrik, 02 June 2015
- Rewmi, “[Crise armée en Casamance: les femmes exigent le pardon de l'Etat et du Mfdc](#)”, *Sen360°*, 03 June 2015
- RFI, “[Guinée-Bissau: marche des femmes pour une paix définitive en Casamance](#)”, RFI, 24 May 2015
- Setal.net, “[Paix en Casamance: des femmes élaborent un document pour faire entendre leur voix](#)”, *Setal.net*, 02 June 2015

TURKEY

The Free Women's Congress (the KJA, a Kurdish women's movement organisation with the legal status of an association since May) called for the peace negotiations in Turkey to restart immediately. The KJA's call placed special emphasis on the idea that the process must guarantee security and freedom for the top leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan. Furthermore, in May the KJA organised a workshop on the role of women in settling the Kurdish issue in Istanbul. The workshop's participants included women from the KJA, the pro-Kurdish party HDP, the Women for Peace Initiative (a platform grouping together women of diverse backgrounds and areas of Turkey, including the Kurdish women's movement), academics, activists and association and organisation representatives. At least one MP from the Kemalist Turkish party CHP, Binnazk Toprak, also participated. During the meeting, Ceylan Bağrıyanık, a Kurdish activist and KJA representative in the Kurdish delegation participating in the peace talks between Turkey and Öcalan since early 2015, said that they represented all the women in Turkey and that together, they would show how to undertake peacebuilding from a woman's perspective. The event took place in a climate of reconciliation among different groups of women, despite the differences in positions among feminists regarding the Kurdish issue

and its actors in recent decades. The MP Pervin Buldan, who is also a member of the Kurdish delegation in the peace talks, credited Öcalan for the gender dimension of the process, indicating that for Öcalan it would not be legitimate without women's participation. According to Buldan, the perspective of women has been discussed at all the meetings of the Kurdish delegation and four of the ten issues raised by Öcalan in his proposed topics for discussion submitted during the Dolmabahçe Declaration in February 2015 “involved women”. Furthermore, after the general elections in Turkey on 7 June, which raised the proportion of women in Parliament from 14.3% to 17.6%, the Women's Group of the pro-Kurdish HDP proposed creating a parliamentary women's group as a new body within the Turkish chamber to facilitate the development of policies by female lawmakers. Of the 97 MPs (compared to 453 male lawmakers), 41 are from the ruling AKP party (16% of the AKP's total seats), 32 from the HDP (40% of the HDP's total seats), 20 from the CHP (15%) and four from the Turkish nationalist party MHP (5%). As part of the peace process, the Kurdish women's movement and civil society women's groups have stressed the need to address issues such as violence against women and the need for a non-discriminatory Constitution.

- JINHA, “[KJA calls for restarting of peace negotiations in Turkey](#)”, JINHA, 24 June 2015
- DIHA, “[Buldan: Peace will be knitted with pioneering power of women](#)”, DIHA, 9 May 2015
- DIHA, “[Bağrıyanık: Women will show building of peace to all Middle East](#)”, DIHA, 9 May 2015
- Demirbas, Gokben “[What does the Turkish general election tell for gender equality in politics?](#)” *Ingenere*, 18 June 2015
- Villellas, Ana. “[El diàleg de pau a Turquia i la dimensió de gènere. Aprenentatges per a una mirada transformadora dels processos de pau des d'una perspectiva feminista](#)”, *Quaderns de Construcció de Pau*, no. 25, ECP, June 2015

PHILIPPINES

During the debate on the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) resulting from the peace agreement between the government of the Philippines and the armed opposition group MILF, different civil society organisations expressed their support for adopting the law, but mentioned its need to encourage greater participation from women and indigenous peoples. The draft BBL establishes that women's participation is guaranteed through a reserved seat in the Bangsamoro Parliament and the appointment of a least one woman in the government, as well as other representatives in different institutions, such as

the Bangsamoro Transition Authority and the Council of Elders of Bangsamoro. However, some organisations indicated that women's participation should be expanded with a higher number of reserved seats. Furthermore, the MILF and government signed an agreement to create a working group in charge of leading development projects aimed at MILF combatants that surrender their weapons and their communities, including special programmes for women integrated into the MILF's auxiliary forces. Women have participated in the MILF essentially in medical and communication support tasks, but also fulfil other roles.

- Kristine Angeli Sabillo, [Peace council wants more seats allotted for women, IP in Bangsamoro parliament](#), *Inquirer*, 6 May 2015

1325

In March, the first gathering of women for peace bringing together representatives of the eight states of the northeastern region of India, *First Northeast India Women Peace Congregation*, was organised by the Control Arms Foundation of India (CAFI) and the Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network (MWGSN). The regional meeting was preceded by a series of meetings in the different states and was aimed at launching the development of an action plan on 1325 to address the conflict situation prevailing in northeastern India. The meeting concluded with the adoption of a statement on women, peace and security. Northeastern India is the scene of various armed conflicts and socio-political crises where armed opposition groups have a large presence. It is a heavily militarised territory where different emergency laws apply that have been denounced by civil

society organisations for protecting serious violations of human rights. The women participating in the meeting demanded the involvement of the women of the region in all peacebuilding efforts, as well as women's economic and political empowerment. After the meeting, which took place in the state of Manipur, there was another civil society gathering in Delhi to give impetus to a possible national action plan for India, also organised by the CAFI, MWGSN and Northeast India Women Initiative for Peace. The participants' recommendations in this meeting referred to how important it is for the government of India to work together with civil society to design this plan, for mechanisms of accountability to be established, for the results to be monitored and for women's safety to be viewed as a national security issue and not as an isolated issue, among other matters.

- Control Arms Foundation of India (CAFI), Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network (MWGSN) in collaboration with Northeast India Women Initiative for Peace (NEIWIP) [Report on Informal Citizen's Consultation on Formulation of National Action Plan](#) 13 May 2015
- [North East women peace congregation in Imphal](#), 27 March 2015

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