

Civil Society and Human Rights in Egypt
Egyptian-Style Waltz
2004-2009

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Introduction

It is difficult to define a specific date for the beginning of the contemporary Egyptian Human Rights movement, however, we can trace it back to the seventies of the past century when two senior lawyers, affiliated with the Egyptian Wafd Liberal Party, namely Ibrahim Talaat and Dr. Wahid Raafat established two associations, one in Alexandria, and one in Cairo to work in the field human rights advocacy.

Dr. Wahid Raafat tried to make out of his newly-established association a meeting point for prominent Egyptian figures working in the field of public rights and freedoms. He succeeded to a large extent, but ironically many of those figures ended up working with governments that systematically violate human rights as part of their policies.

These two associations did not have a significant role in protecting human rights, as the local and international political situation was not appropriate at that time. Also, the ideas they were promoting did not find their way to the target audience as media outlets in Egypt were rare and state-controlled and the technologies for transferring information were not advanced like today, to overcome any barriers that could obscure the truth.

The same could be said about the Arab Human Rights Movement, which also started some time during the 1970s. We can say that the real beginning of the Egyptian and Arab Human Rights Movements marked the establishment of the Arab Organization for Human Rights by a number of prominent Arab public figures in the 1980s, including Mr. Fathi Radwan, Mr. Muhammad Fayeeg, Dr. Saad Al-Din Ibrahim, Dr. Farag Fouda and others.

The surprising observation here is that while the first wave of human rights advocacy was started by the liberal trend; the second wave, which was stronger and continue until now, was initiated by prominent supporters of the nationalist trend (including Nasserites and Bathists), who met on the eve of the fall of Beirut in the hands of Israeli troops, with the aim of examining the reasons of this crisis. They concluded that Arabs were defeated by Israelis due to the lack of minimum respect for public freedom and rights in Arab communities.

In 2009, the Egyptian human rights movement completes forty years. Hence it was appropriate to review what the movement was able to achieve and the obstacles they faced. However, the objective of this paper is not to review the past forty years, but to present an overview of civil society as a whole, and the Egyptian human rights movement in particular, and the role they have played during the past five years (2004-2009) to support democracy and good governance.

1. Definition of civil society according to this paper

According to the definition adopted here, civil society represents communities of optional nature, established by the free will of its initiators and work in the fields of development or support for specific groups or society as a whole. As per this definition, civil society in Egypt is composed of:

- NGOs registered according to Law 84/2002,
- Not-for-profit civil corporations established according to the Egyptian civil law
- Professional corporations established by the laws of their specific professions, like law firms, medical firms and others,
- Trade unions established by the law of each profession; and
- Political parties established by the Law of Political Parties.

The one thing that is common among all these forms of associations is that they do not seek profit, or do not distribute their profits (if they make any) among their partners or members or reinvest them.

For the purposes of this paper, we will only focus on NGOs registered according to Law 84/2002, and civil corporations working in development, since they were the main players in all the developments that took place in Egypt during the tackled period.

2. Challenges and restrictions facing civil society in Egypt

Civil society in Egypt functions in an unhealthy atmosphere, for a number of reasons, including the legal restrictions slowing its movement down; the administrative interventions in its activities; utilizing state-controlled media outlets to defame civil society and its leaders; the instability of funding that shakes its sustainability; as well as the emergence of alternative organizations affiliated to the government and the National Democratic Party that aim to scramble civil society entities.

2.1. Legal restrictions and administrative interventions

Most NGOs in Egypt are subject to the Law of Associations No. 84/2002, which subjects NGOs to the Ministry of Social Solidarity, where they cannot be established or perform any of their activities, including selecting their Board of Directors or receiving funds, without the prior approval of the Ministry of Social Solidarity.

- The law conditioned the approval of the Ministry of Social Solidarity for establishing an association. In fact, the approval or refusal of the establishment of associations is not in the hands of the Ministry of Social Solidarity, but rather of the Ministry of Interiors that reviews the application of the association in question through State Security.
- The law granted the Minister of Social Solidarity the right to dissolve an association at his sole discretion. Although associations have the right to appeal against such decision in court, the decision is executed immediately without waiting for the verdict, which restricts the association's access to

acquire the needed documents to acquit their case, as such documents become in the hands of the administrative entity, since as soon as the dissolution decision is issued, the police expel the persons in charge of the association from their posts and hand the association over to an employee at the Ministry of Social Solidarity.

- The law delegated the Minister of Justice, as a representative of the executive power, to form a committee, in the constituency of jurisdiction of each governorate, to settle the disputes between the Ministry of Social Solidarity and the associations. This committee is an administrative committee, and its decisions are clearly biased and inefficient as most of its members are affiliated with the executive power.
- The law granted the administrative body the right to object to the stipulations of the main bylaws of civil associations or to any of the associations' founders, as well as to ask the court to rule the temporary suspension of the association's activities.
- The law preconditioned the approval of the administrative body in case an association wants to amend any of its bylaws.
- The legislator used vague expressions to restrict the work of civil associations, such as the expressions of national unity, public order and morals, or having political activities, although there are no clear definitions of any of these expressions. In some cases, educating citizens about their electoral rights is considered a political activity, hence resulting in the dissolution of the association, while in other cases it is not. This depends on the subjective level to which the Ministry of Social Solidarity is content with the association itself.
- The law restricted the right of associations to join any networks, clubs, entities or organizations located outside Egypt without the prior approval of the administrative body.
- The law restricted the right of associations to obtain any funds or participate in the implementation of any funded projects without the personal permission of the Minister of Social Solidarity. The Ministry uses this right to apply pressure on associations, as while the law gives the ministry only 60 days to declare its decision, sometimes the ministry waits for more than six months to declare its approval or rejection. Mostly this leads to losing the funding opportunity for some associations, while other associations submit to the conditions of the administrative body, concerning their nature of activities, so as not to miss the funding opportunities available in the process.
- The law granted the administrative body the right to refuse any decision issued by the association Board of Directors, and to demand its withdrawal or change; so associations are unable to decide on any internal issues, including appointing a director or other senior staff, without the approval of the Ministry of Social Solidarity.

- The law stipulated that associations submit their candidature list for the membership of their board of directors to the administrative body within three days following the end of the nomination process, sixty days prior to holding the elections. It also granted the administrative body the right to exclude any of the candidates.
- The law empowered the Minister of Social Affairs to appoint a delegate that has the jurisdictions of the members of the board of directors if the number of board members was not sufficient to hold a meeting, rather than increasing the number of votes for the present members.

Although these restrictions constrain the movement of NGOs established according to the Law of Association No. 84/2002, the other entities that are not subject to this law, even if they enjoyed more freedom to function, their activities are still restricted under the pretext that they are working outside the context of this law, as these entities are prohibited from performing a wide range of civil activities, hence requiring several connections to be able to work in the field reasonably.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Finance considers the funds received by these entities as income subject to taxation, which puts them in a real dilemma as they do not generate profits and spend all the funds received on the projects they implement (for which they specifically receive the funding), but they are demanded to hold ledgers and pay taxes for profits that they do not make.

Also, these entities are subject to successive security interventions in their activities and they have to notify state security prior to holding any activity, including giving state security a list of all participants and their contact details. Many people are reluctant to participate in such activities for fear of holding records at the State Security.

2.2 Using the state-controlled media to distort the image of civil society and its leaders

During the past five years, Egyptian media has witnessed more diversity and openness than ever due to the establishment of numerous newspapers that are not state-controlled. However, the level of independence of these newspapers is doubtful. The income generated by advertisements is still centralized through various ministries and governmental entities. Also, most prominent businessmen in Egypt, who have the most rewarding advertisements, are more or less affiliated with the state and thus can control what these newspapers publish.

Since 2005, civil society has been facing unfair media assaults that aim to distort its image. These campaigns increase against civil society associations that work in the field of politics development, such as monitoring elections, combating corruption and others. Such assaults accused them of theft, encouraging foreign interference in Egyptian internal affairs, working with international intelligence services, mentioning imaginary figures about their personal wealth and exaggerated figures about the funds they receive.

These assaults intensified after the U.S Department of State decided to fund civil associations that are not directly subject to the Law of Associations through the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), when the US Ambassador signed, in a press conference, contracts of projects with five institutions, including the United Group (Attorneys-at-Law, Legal Consultants and Human Rights Advocates) and Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies. This assault has reached a degree in which the Ministry of Endowments incited the preachers of mosques affiliated to it to allocate one of their Friday sermons to insult the author of this paper together with Dr. Saad al-Din Ibrahim, as the main players in the American project to introduce imposed democracy in Egypt.

Despite that responding to these campaigns consumes considerable time from human rights activists; they ironically helped society become more intrigued to know about the work of these entities, hence sometimes bringing about opposite effects as people realize that when the corrupt government uses its media outlets to attack a certain institution or person, it means that the attacked entities actually act for the benefit of society and hence they get increasing support.

2.3 Instability of funding

Although, it is not a secret that funding is the bloodstream of civil work, civil associations suffer from instability of funding for their programs and frequent changes in the trends of donors, without prior consultation with them.

We can take the USAID as an example, during the period 2005-2008 it funded Egyptian civil society associations at a large scale, where it responded to fund requests not only from NGOs, but also from civil corporations, and others. This largely refreshed the civil society scene in Egypt and increased its effectiveness. However, all of a sudden and without prior consultation it decided to stop funding any entity that is not registered according to Law No. 84/2002, which threatens to stop the activities of many civil society entities, or even impede already existing activities.

It is speculated that the USAID took this decision in response to the pressures of the Egyptian government that requested that the former stops funding civil institutions working in the field of democracy and human rights (that are not subject the control of the Egyptian government) as a precondition to ease tensions with the United States. This is a clear indication that restricting civil work in Egypt is not just caused by the successive Egyptian governments, but also from governments that declare their commitment to the cause of democracy, such as the USA and the European Union.

Furthermore, external funding is unstable, as the duration of projects are for a maximum of two years, which does not allow civil society associations to maintain qualified employees until they are lucky to get new funding or extension, which is an obstacle to accumulating human resources and sustainability.

In all cases the government controls who receives funding and who doesn't, as according to the Law of Associations, no association can receive funding without the prior approval of the Egyptian government, in addition to the fact that many donor organizations consult with the government, whether formally or informally, on who to grant funding and who not to.

We can exclude internal funding from the picture, as on the one hand the culture of supporting civil institutions is still weak in Egypt as many people prefer to donate to charity devoted to providing direct assistance to the poor; while on the other hand prominent businessmen in Egypt are connected directly to the government, hence are reluctant to assist them for fear on their interests. It has to be born in mind too that 48% of the Egyptian population is under poverty line.

2.4. Creation of quasi government civil institutions to disrupt civil society

In its attempts to apply pressure on civil society institutions and curtailing them, the government resorts to pushing many of its subordinates to establish institutions that work in the fields of political development and human rights. By doing this the government aims to minimize the chances of independent civil society associations to receive funding and to improve the image of the state to the world regarding democracy and human rights.

This phenomenon has spread during the period from 2003-2007, where many of the members of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), as per the request of the NDP leaders, established organizations and institutions that work in the field of political development in particular. This occurred immediately after the U.S.A and the EU decided to increase funding to civil institutions that work in this same field.

Since they are close to the Egyptian government and the ruling party, the activities of those institutions were facilitated, they were allowed to receive any amount of funding, donors were encouraged to support them, in addition to facilitations offered to them by the government and the sponsorship of their activities by Ministers, governors and high rank officials, which helped in highlighting their activities.

This is dangerous because on the one hand it leads to the slow suffocation and death of the associations independent from the government as a result of lack of funding and preventing them from implementing free activities, and on the other hand it opens the door for government-affiliated associations to be the only representative of human rights in Egypt and repeat the Tunisian example, where Tunisia ended the effective presence of independent human rights organizations by creating entities affiliated to it that present a fake image of the dire human rights situation.

3. Civil society areas of success and failure

Despite all the above mentioned problems, it is important to note that civil society had accomplished stunning successes during the past five years. To be fair, we have to refer to the international climate during 2004-2008 that has become more interested and involved in democracy and human rights, coming up with diverse initiatives aiming to improve human rights conditions in the Arab world.

Such initiatives varied between governmental, nongovernmental, international and Arab initiatives, including the Partnership Initiative for Democracy, Foundation for the Future, Alexandria Initiative, Doha Initiative, Casablanca Declaration, Beirut Declaration and the Arab League Initiative for Democracy.

This pressing international climate made the Arab systems bend until the storm passes, which allowed civil society associations to work actively under clear international protection, receive real funding and start a real wide-scale process of change in Egypt.

3.1. Fields of success

3.1.1 Supporting the rights of women and children

The Egyptian civil society was able to achieve multiple successes in the field of supporting the rights of women and children. With the rights of the child, a significant breakthrough was the issuance of the Egyptian Child Law, which came in line with the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to a large extent, although it was faced by severe internal criticism. The peak of success in that arena was establishing a Ministry for the Family and Housing that pledged on top of its priorities improving the conditions of the Egyptian child in a decade.

Concerning women's rights, the Egyptian situation had witnessed sound improvement as there are three female ministers assuming the Ministries of Manpower, International cooperation and Population. The first two of these ministries were traditionally assigned to men. Furthermore, there are eight female parliament members during this parliamentary session that ends in 2010. In fact, if the government fulfilled its promises and passed a law that grants women a quota in the parliament during the next legislative elections, the number of women in the parliament will increase to more than 60 members.

The Presidential Decree issued in 2003 to appoint the attorney Ms. Tahani Jebali as a judge in the Supreme Constitutional Court marked a radical change in the perception of the government and the society of women, as although there were several attempts by women since the 1940s to assume judicial office, this was always faced by governmental opposition from within the judiciary itself with the pretext that women are unqualified to assume such a delicate post.

In September 2006, the Minister of Justice asked the President of the Court of Cassation, President of the Supreme Judicial Council in Egypt, to approve the appointment of women as "judges" in principle, according to the rules set forth in the Judicial Authority Law, and in implementation of Article 40 of the Egyptian Constitution. In April 2007, the President issued a Presidential Decree to appoint 31 female judges and in the same month, 30 female judges took the oath before the Supreme Judicial Council, headed by the President of the Court of Cassation.

The year 2008 witnessed the appointment of the first female Islamic marriage official (Ma'zoun) and the first Christian female mayor, Mrs. Eva Habil Kiolus, who is an elected member of the popular local council of Assiut governorate and was appointed as the mayor of "Kamboha Bahri" village, Assiut, which is inhabited by a Christian majority.

According to some human rights organizations, the participation rate of women in senior managerial positions had increased from 15.3% in 2007 - 2008 to 24% in 2008 - 2009. The number of women enrolled as voters increased from 12,1 million, a

38,4% of the total enrollment in 2005, to 14.4 million, 40% of the total enrollment in 2007.

This development couldn't have been achieved without the effective role of civil society associations on the one hand and the international pressure on the other hand, in addition to the effective role played by Egypt's First Lady. However, the crucial element is that the government finds that achieving progress in these fields could help to improve its image among international public opinion and cover up the shortcomings in bringing about real development in the fields that might threaten its societal control, such as ensuring democratic and fair elections, or allowing political participation and freedom to establish political parties. Achieving progress in human rights conditions in Egypt depends on the synchronization of three wills at the same time: the international community, the executive authority and civil society. However, it is not an easy task for these three wills to always meet.

3.1.2. The many faces of Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression can embrace freedom to write and publish, along with various forms of arts, in addition to voicing out demands through demonstrations, protests and peaceful strikes. The period from 2004 to 2007 was the spring of freedom in Egypt. This freedom has started to decline with the decline of international support for the cause of democracy.

Despite that we are still firmly convinced that the international community was the most significant player in the improvement during the tackled period, however, for three decades, civil society tried to give the society the chance to enjoy those rights, and worked hand in hand with the international community to pressure the Egyptian government to achieve their goals.

During the above mentioned period, civil society has grabbed the rights to demonstrate, sit-in, and strike, which is measurable in the thousands of strikes and sit-ins that took place, with the rate of two strikes, demonstrations or sit-ins per day. Demonstrations embraced tens to tens of thousands, while for the first time in its history since 1919, Egypt witnesses protest stands for Egyptian judges, with threats to strike; in addition to numerous labor uprisings in multiple locations. The strikes and demonstrations at hand can be divided into two categories:

First Category: includes demands of political nature, such as demanding free elections, releasing some detainees, terminating the state of emergency, heightening freedom of the press or against the closure of newspapers ... etc. The number of demonstrators of this type never exceeded one thousand demonstrators; while their numbers diminished in some demonstrations and sit-ins to just dozens.

In spite of the small number of demonstrators, some of these sit-ins were courageous and untraditional: Courageous such as demanding the release of political detainees right in front of the State Security Office in Cairo; which represents control and power for Egyptians; untraditional such as what some NGOs did when they assembled in a prominent and well-known mosque to collectively pray against the government.

Regardless of the results, these sit-ins and demonstrations helped in mobilizing the Egyptian society to further demand democracy and other rights that were un-tackled before.

Second Category: includes demands for raising wages, improving employment conditions, or demand a specific legislation for a specific profession. These protests represented more than ninety percent of the protests that occurred during the tackled period. The number of protestors in this category ranged between hundreds to tens of thousands. Nearly all professions protested under this category, including university professors, judges, and even experts of the Ministry of Justice.

It is noteworthy that while political demonstrations failed to achieve any tangible outcomes, demonstrations of profession-related nature relatively succeeded in obtaining tangible results with rapid response to the demands of the demonstrators (partially or wholly), or even by granting protestors more demands beyond their own aspirations.

As for freedom of the press during the past five years, it was marked with unprecedented openness, including direct criticism of the president, and has witnessed an increase in the number of independent newspapers, as now Egypt has four major private newspapers, in addition to dozens of Egyptian weekly newspapers. In spite of the harshness of some of the published materials, there was tolerance on the part of the Egyptian authorities.

The number of Egyptian satellite channels has multiplied since 2004, in spite of the uproar that surrounded the Satellite Broadcasting Document issued as a recommendation by the Council of Arab Ministers of Information, and which was successfully stopped from becoming a binding law through the pressure of civil society. It should be noted that the Egyptian government still monopolizes terrestrial broadcasting of radio and television.

It is important to mention that by the end of 2007, the abovementioned freedoms started to shrink gradually, as the workers who had organized demonstrations and strikes in Mahalla al-Kubra were sentenced to imprisonment up to three years by the Supreme State Security courts, established according to the state of emergency. Furthermore a number of editors in chief were tried on charges of defaming the President of the Republic, and numerous journalists who criticized corruption in its various facets were punished with unfair sentences and expensive fines that amounted, in some cases, to 80,000 pounds, which is huge considering that the average salary of a journalist in Egypt does not exceed 1500 Egyptian Pounds at best.

Moreover, some newspapers were confiscated, especially those distributed in Egypt under foreign licenses. The government had also used its resources and connections with prominent businessmen to withhold advertisements from certain newspapers that criticize government policies. This forced such newspapers to stop and we can provide Al-Badil Newspaper as an example of a good and professional newspaper that had to stop due to lack of advertisements.

3.1.3. Freedom of belief and religion

The Egyptian civil society was preoccupied by freedom of belief that is facing a major setback in Egypt, although the Egyptian Constitution ensures freedom of belief and makes it absolute, without even linking it to enacting a law to organize it, which makes it a natural right not subject to any law or legislation.

The real success of civil society in this arena is not just in ensuring the acceptance of freedom of belief by society and before the law, but in encouraging religious minorities to profess their beliefs, and legally defending them by all means, as well as advocating for societal acceptance of other faiths.

The success of civil society in this field is manifest in three main aspects:

First: Mobilizing minorities to claim their rights, and legally supporting them.

Second: Launching media campaigns against the state and the fundamentalist trends that attempt to deny the freedom to believe or siege those who want to practice it. This includes the attempts to abolish Article II of the Egyptian Constitution, which states that Islamic Sharia is the main source of legislation in Egypt.

Third: Obtaining a judgment from the Administrative Court acknowledging the right of Baha'is to put a dash (-) mark in their National IDs in the religion slot instead of putting Muslim/Christian contrary to their belief. This was the offspring of the efforts of numerous human rights-based NGOs.

3.1.4. The independence of the judiciary

Civil society has struggled for about 15 years to ensure the independence of the judiciary. It remarkably succeeded in obtaining a new law in 2007 that has greatly improved the working conditions of the judiciary and helped to push it forward on the road to independence.

However, up till now there are several problems concerning the independence of the judiciary, on top of which is that the authority to supervise and control the work of judges is still in the hands of the Minister of Justice, who is part of the executive authority. Moreover, judges in Egypt are denied the right to establish unions and there are clear interventions in the affairs of judges' clubs, as the Ministry of Justice uses the money of the Special Funds to pressure judges either by granting or withholding benefits from them. It is noteworthy that the problem of referring civilians to military courts is one of the basic problems that weakens the judiciary and grants the government the right to choose a particular court to try a particular defendant. However, the success of civil society is still a step on the long way ahead.

3.2. Areas of limited success

The Egyptian civil society was at the threshold of making radical changes in the status of democracy in Egypt, helped by the US foreign policies towards the middle East subsequent to the incidents of September 11th. These policies changed with the new administration, which will cause the slowing down of many of the successes that were foreseen. However, even if the US policies were still the same, there are areas that the government will never grant any progress in, as it will mean directly losing its control

over society or even being thrown out of power completely. However, we must admit that in spite of that civil society has succeeded in achieving some limited successes in those fields, as follows:

3.2.1. The right to form political parties

Civil society attempted numerous times to abolish the law of political parties, which makes establishing political parties impossible without the approval of the ruling National Democratic Party, as the right to approve or reject the establishment of a new political party is granted by a committee headed by the Secretary-General of the National Democratic Party and includes in its membership ministers and government officials. The law grants this committee broad powers, in addition to the fact that challenging its decisions takes place before an administrative body, half of which is composed of public figures appointed by the Minister of Justice, and the other half is composed of the judges of the Supreme Administrative Court.

Furthermore, the law grants the committee the right to reject the establishment of a certain party if its programs do not represent an addition to the political scene, without specifying what the required additions are. Because of this provision the Committee had rejected numerous parties, including Al-Wasat (the middle) Party that was rejected more than four times, and Karama (dignity) Party that was rejected three times and other parties. The committee only allows the emergence of worthless marginal parties that do not enjoy popularity.

All the attempts of civil society to abolish the law of parties, improve its stipulations or even change the structure of the committee in charge were doomed to fail. The political scene in Egypt is actually dead and Egypt is ironically governed by "a single party system in a pluralistic form." However, the attempts of civil society to improve the capacity of the existing political parties are ongoing, as they provide training to the partisan activists and leaders on how to run electoral campaigns, influence people or on presentation and persuasion skills, as well as training them on how to structure a democratic party, including the internal bylaws and accepting new members. Civil society campaigns have labeled the law of parties with notoriety in the eyes of the people.

3.2.2. Ensuring the integrity of elections

Civil society has obtained the official right to monitor elections during the parliamentary elections of 2005 and since 1995 civil society has actually started monitoring the elections, despite the governmental opposition at that time, and it managed through more than a decade to establish the importance of monitoring elections to a degree that it is likely that the government would accept international monitoring of elections during the 2010 round.

However, monitoring elections did not lead to tangible results, because although the local monitoring reports had documented all violations that accompanied the electoral process through the elections of 1995-2000-2005, the end result is that no real measures were taken to ensure the integrity of the electoral process. But even the Shura Council renewal elections and the elections of local councils had witnessed large-scale and flagrant fraud. This highlighted the need of civil society organizations

to look for another method to ensure the integrity of elections other than monitoring and reporting.

Although the reports of civil society on the fraudulence of elections could not bring about international rejection of the false results of the elections, they initiated a spirit of free and fair elections among the people, who were reluctant to participate in any questionable electoral process. This might lead illegitimate governments to lose their societal legitimacy in the future.

3.2.3. Combating corruption

Although Egyptian civil society started to intensively work to combat corruption and ensure transparency after Egypt's ratification of the International Convention against Corruption, which was published in the Official Gazette, civil society is still unable to reach effective results in its battle against corruption, especially in senior levels.

Combating corruption on higher levels is extremely difficult and beyond the capacity of civil society organizations in the current situation, given the utter lack of democracy in Egypt, for a variety of reasons, including hiding some items of the military budget for example or the complexity of the overall state budget.

However, civil society can achieve reasonable results in the process of raising awareness on the importance of preserving public funds, as well as making citizens more interested in reporting incidents of public funds abuse, or issuing reports on corruption. This is still a new field for civil society and it needs time to be able to assess success or failure. Moreover, civil society is working in the field of reforming legislations, especially those related to access to information, as there is no legislation in Egypt that stipulates the free flow of information, which can help if achieved with the battle against corruption.

3.2.4. Combating torture

According to the reports of the UN Special Rapporteur, Egypt is one of the states where torture is practiced systematically, and that still refuses to receive the Special Rapporteur on Torture. Civil society was the only player in the battle against torture in Egypt, especially in the tackled period, as the international war on terrorism has got the U.S itself involved in acts of torture, abuse, violence and collaboration with the security services of several states, including Egypt.

Most donor countries had refused to finance projects related to protection from torture and the use of violence, and the international reaction towards torture crimes wasn't as strong as it used to be prior to the September 11th incidents. However, civil society has achieved important results. On the one hand, combating torture became on the agenda of the different segments of the Egyptian society, including the Egyptian government itself that admitted its existence. On the other hand, the civil campaign that was launched by Egyptian human rights organizations led to increasing the rate of referring officers involved in torture and abuse cases to trial, as more than seventy officers were referred to trials during the past five years and 75% of these trials were concluded by accusing officers.

It is important to note that torture crimes in Egypt are not crimes involving moral dishonor, and therefore the officers are able to return to their posts after serving their sentences, which threatens the families of the victims who might be target for revenge.

Conclusion

To conclude, on the level of public rights and freedoms we must admit that no core changes have occurred concerning the ruling system, as the transition of power is still a taboo in Egypt, as a thirty years old citizen now does not know any President other than the current one, President Muhammad Hosni Mubarak. However, this paper indicates that changes are happening even if slowly as the human rights movement, with a wide international support (moral and material) succeeded in obliging the Egyptian regime to try to improve its image. Accordingly, a National Council for Human Rights was established, along with the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood. Those councils have considerable authority, although they still hold advisory status and share similar interests with the government.

There is a fuss about democracy and human rights, and some human rights organizations were granted the right to monitor the electoral process and to work freely with parliament or parties or other entities. This, although very important achievements themselves, did not lead to many tangible results, as **the situation of human rights in Egypt is similar to the famous waltz dance one step forward and two steps backward.**

Concerning freedom from torture, which is a basic human right, torture still represents an approved mean for extracting confessions, at least in criminal cases, to the point that made the Arab world, and Egypt in the heart of it, the ideal place for the United States to send its detainees to be tortured to extract confessions from them and return them back to the U.S.A. This proves the supremacy of our security services over other security services around the world. The continuity of torture in the Arab world and Egypt shows the failure of human rights organizations in providing protection for humans.

Furthermore, obtaining fair trials and an independent judiciary are still farfetched aspirations. Despite the attempts of the Egyptian human rights movements to secure fair trials for defendants, a country like Egypt has replaced normal judiciary with military judiciary in many political cases, and hence we should be speaking about independence of the military judiciary instead of independence of civil judiciary!!

The same can be said about many fields, such as economic rights in the Arab world, the rights of poor peasants, the rights of working classes who are exploited in a manner close to forced labor, the rights of the inhabitants of cemeteries to a decent form of living, etc...

The question is: Did the Egyptian human rights movement fail to change the dire human rights conditions in Egypt? The answer is: Was it expected to implement these changes all by itself?

The human rights movement is not a movement for change, it is a buzzing alert for raising awareness and awakening people, guiding the way for the winds of change. After that others must pick up the flag and complete the march. Eventually they will be the ones to reap the fruits of what civil society battled for. **Civil Society and the human rights movement will always remain like the maintenance team in car races, they prepare the cars, lay the plans and without their efforts the driver can never win. But in the end, only the driver must run the mile and win the race.**