**Statement by Sarah Boukhary, WILPF**

I am Sarah Boukhary, Interim Middle East and North Africa Co-Director at the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, the oldest international women’s peace organization in the world, founded in 1915. WILPF has brought together women from around the world who are united in promoting gender equality, political, economic and social justice for all. In the Middle East and North Africa, WILPF stands firm beside feminist activists from the region working on advancing feminist peace for equality, justice and demilitarised security in the region. Egypt is one of our focus countries in the region.

The current political and economic situation in Egypt reflects the lack of action to uphold women’s rights. Despite Egypt’s repeated promises to do more for women’s rights, these have not resulted in concrete action.

For the UPR of Egypt, we have submitted a summary report addressing the following issues:

- Violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment, child marriage, trafficking and FGM

- Discriminatory laws against women, including personal status laws and the Penal Code

- Women human rights defenders

Our recommendations will be shown on the Powerpoint as I speak.

1. **The first issue pertains to violence against women and girls**

In 2017, Cairo was the world’s most dangerous city for women due to increased sexual harassment and violence. Although sexual harassment has been defined as a crime in the Penal Code, no significant progress has been made on the issue.

**Child marriage and forced marriage** are common in Egypt, especially in rural areas, and are interlinked with depriving girls of their right to education. Although the legal age of marriage was raised from 16 to 18 in 2008, the State has not taken serious steps to combat child marriages or to punish perpetrators of child marriage, whether parents or marriage registrars. The government must ensure the effective prosecution of all individuals performing and facilitating child marriage.

The government has made important efforts in combating **human trafficking**. However, not enough is done to prosecute perpetrators and the Human Trafficking Law contains several loopholes. So-called “tourist marriages” of young Egyptian girls, usually from poor rural areas, to rich and older non-Egyptian men constitute a new form of trafficking. Moreover, it is estimated that 59% of female domestic workers in Egypt are trapped in **labour exploitation**. Domestic workers are still not covered by the Labour Code and do not benefit from any social and legal protection systems. It is therefore essential that Egypt amends the Labour Code or adopt new legislation to ensure the protection of domestic workers, including migrant domestic workers.

Egypt is one of the 10 countries with the highest prevalence rate of **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** in the world, whereby 87% of women and girls have undergone FGM. Despite the tightening of penalties for FGM in 2016, the State’s efforts to enforce the law are still insufficient. Article 61 of the Law on FGM gives perpetrators grounds for impunity by claiming that FGM is justified in cases of “medical necessity” or to save the girl’s life, which is unfounded. Furthermore, in practice, penalties are only imposed in cases where FGM has led to death; and even such cases, penalties are often commuted. In light of this, Egypt should repeal Article 61 of the Penal Code, strictly enforce the criminalization of FGM, and expand the powers of medical unions to revoke the medical licenses of doctors and medical staff who carry it out.

1. **The second issue is discriminatory laws against women**

In Egypt, Personal Status Law is the law governing family issues and personal matters in Egypt. It was first issued in 1920, and modifications were made between then and 2005. Despite such amendments, these laws still contain discriminatory provisions against women, including but not limited to: marriage, divorce, and child custody.

While men have the unilateral right to **divorce** by repudiation, a woman needs to prove specific faults before she is allowed to file for divorce in court. Women were granted the right to unilaterally terminate a marriage without giving reasons in 2000 (what is known as *khula*), but this could only apply if the woman forfeits her dowry and waives all her material rights.

Under the Personal Status Law, a mother is denied **custody of her children** if she marries another man after divorce, while a father retains custody of his children even if he gets married to another woman. This violates women’s right to equality in family relations. Egypt should therefore fulfil its international obligations by amending discriminatory laws and provisions against women, including in the Penal Code, and also adopt and implement legislation that criminalize violence against women.

1. **The third issue is women human rights defenders**

The targeting of human rights defenders, including WHRDs, is systematic. Measures against them include: travel bans imposed as “precautionary measures” without prior information, withholding of passports at the airport upon return from abroad; freezing of accounts without investigation or proper legal procedures for notification. The National Strategy on Violence against Women fails to refer to WHRDs and to their protection.

Women human rights defenders, experience these violations in gender-specific ways. For example, smearing campaigns against women human rights defenders exploits degrading and misogynist stereotypes of women’s sexuality or question her role as a mother to delegitimize her in the community. Human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, and others have been also been subject to reprisals for engaging with UN human rights mechanisms.

Measures must be taken to immediately cease ongoing harassment, including defamation campaigns and threats, of human rights defenders. And all “precautionary measures” against human rights defenders, such as the freezing of accounts, travel bans, passport confiscations and other intimidation measures must be put to an end.