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Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme
International Federation for Human Rights
Federación internacional de los derechos humanos
الفدرالية الدولية لحقوق الانسان



EURO-MEDITERRANEAN HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK
RÉSEAU EURO-MÉDITERRANÉEN DES DROITS DE L'HOMME
الشبكة الأوروبية - المتوسطية لحقوق الإنسان



EU – Egypt Association Council Action Plan's Human Rights Section Falls Short of NGO Expectations

Brussels, Cairo, March 7th 2007

Following the meeting of the Association Council between the European Union (EU) and Egypt held yesterday, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN), the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights studies (CIHRS) take note of the adoption of an EU/Egypt Action Plan, developed within the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy.

This bilaterally negotiated document presented a precious opportunity for the development of the first-ever roadmap for human rights reforms in Egypt. Unfortunately, and despite repeated warnings from our organizations, the human rights language included in the document has been significantly watered down, rendering it closer to a declaration of intentions than to a program for action. The document's human rights elements fail to reflect the recommendations of United Nations bodies and experts, or even those of Egypt's official National Council for Human Rights.

Our organisations take positive note of the fact that the document calls on both parties to, promote the independence of the judiciary; improve prison conditions; tackle pre-trial and administrative detention systems; promote freedom of expression, assembly and association; protect the rights of women and children; fight against discrimination, racism and xenophobia; incorporate international human rights and labour law into domestic legislation; combat impunity; and ensure respect for human rights in the fight against terrorism in accordance with international law.

We also welcome the fact that a regular dialogue on human rights and democracy will be held under the framework of the Association Agreement.

Nevertheless, our organizations are deeply disappointed that on the majority of issues, the human rights section of the Action Plan stops short of stipulating any concrete commitments for the parties, and thus fails to respond to the concerns raised by civil society on a number of occasions. Among the most serious shortcomings of the document are the following:

- The entire human rights chapter lacks any specific, measurable and time bound commitments;
- The issue of torture is never mentioned in the document, while it has been documented as

systematic by various UN experts on a number of occasions and cited as "the biggest single human rights violation in Egypt" in a 2005 country report issued by the European Commission.

- While acknowledging the generic role of civil society, the Action Plan does not foresee any specific role for civil society in monitoring and reviewing the application of the document.

We therefore call on Egypt and the EU to adopt a forward-looking approach with a view to addressing the aforementioned shortcomings.

We call upon both parties to establish a political mechanism for dialogue, evaluation, and systematic and regular monitoring of the situation of human rights and reforms, in a specific Subcommittee on Human Rights in the framework of the Association Agreement. The Subcommittee should hold regular and systematic consultations with civil society to seek its assessment of the evolution of the situation of human rights in Egypt.

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