

Political parties and civil society organizations reject the new associations law

The undersigned political parties and civil society organizations condemn and reject the proposed law on civic associations drafted by parliamentary committees, because it effectively eradicates civil society and defers administration of it to the government and security apparatus. Parliament began to debate the bill and approved 40 of its 89 articles yesterday in record time. It is scheduled to resume debate on the remaining articles on November 15. We also condemn parliament's treatment of civil society as an enemy to be defeated through secret plots and laws.

The bill closely resembles the previous government-sponsored bill released to the media in September, which was rejected by rights organizations. The bill drafted by the "people's representatives," however, is even more repressive and hostile to civic associations and the very idea of volunteerism and collective initiatives. If approved, the law could destroy legally established civic associations working in social development and services. Such organizations will be required under the law to reconcile their legal status with the new statute, which sets overly broad conditions for registration, such as that the organization in question not engage in activity that conflicts with national security and the public order. In fact, the law will give the competent administrative body (as yet undefined) the power to determine whether an association's activities correspond with the needs of society and development plans. This condition heralds an explicit return to Law 32/1964 on associations, known as the law that 'nationalized' civil society.

Similar to the National Security Council provided for in the constitution, which is responsible for identifying ways to secure the country and meet crises and disasters, the bill provides for an entity known as the National Agency for the Regulation of Foreign Non-Governmental Organizations. To be constituted by presidential decree, the agency will consist of representatives from three security bodies, as well representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Justice, International Cooperation, the competent ministry for civic associations, the Central Bank, the anti-money laundering unit, and the Administrative Control Authority. Under the law,

this agency will determine all matters related to the affairs of international NGOs, funding, and cooperation between Egyptian associations and any foreign body. In utter disregard for constitutional principles, the law specifies that applications to the agency receiving no response within two months be considered denied. In an attempt to combat civic action by all possible means, the law gives the government the right to object to all internal association resolutions, nominations to their boards of directors, and the regularity of their meetings.

The law drafted by the people's representatives provides for custodial sentences of up to five years' imprisonment and fines of up to LE1 million for associations that conduct opinion polls or field research, engage in civic association (NGO)work without registration, or cooperate in any way with any international body—including the UN—without the necessary approval. The bill goes further by imposing a maximum sentence of one-year imprisonment on any body other than the competent administrative body—even a government body—that licenses an entity to operate and engage in activities that fall within the remit of civic associations and foundations. It makes a decision by an association to move its headquarters to another building without notifying the administrative body a misdemeanor offense, punishable by up to one year in prison. Setting a dangerous precedent, the bill also makes the person responsible for the association's management criminally liable for any administrative infraction.

The state has already taken real steps to eliminate Egyptian civil society organizations by prosecuting case no. 173/2011 on foreign funding, and several organizations and their current and former directors have been banned from travel and have had their assets frozen. This new law, however, would pave the way for the eradication of any sort of civic action geared to development, charitable activities, and services. The operation of local development associations throughout Egyptian villages and hamlets, which provide services to local residents, will become nearly impossible.

Signed parties:

- 1- Bread and Liberty Party
- 2- Dostour Party
- 3- Egypt Freedom Party
- 4- Egyptian Popular Current

5- Egyptian Social Democratic Party

6- Socialist Popular Alliance

Signed Organization:

1. Nazra for Feminist Studies
2. ADALAH Center for Rights & Freedoms "ACRF"
3. Al-Haqqanya Foundation of Rights and freedoms
4. Andalus Institute for Tolerance and Anti-Violence Studies
5. Arab Network for Human Rights Information
6. Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression
7. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
8. Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance
9. Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms
10. El-Nadeem Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture
11. Foundation of the Victims of Abduction and Forced Disappearance
12. Haby Center for Environmental Rights
13. Hesham Mubarak Law Center
14. Masryoon Against Religious Discrimination
15. National group for Human Rights and Law
16. The Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement
17. The Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights
18. The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
19. The Egyptian Observatory for Training and Consultation
20. The Human Rights Legal Assistance Group
21. The Land Center for Human Rights
22. The New Woman Foundation