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Gender-Based Violence in Prisons: A Look at Women's Experiences in Prisons and Detention Centers in Egypt

The situation of women in prisons and detention centers in Egypt is not much different from their situation elsewhere. The violence, discrimination and exploitation which women face in prisons and detention centers is merely a manifestation of what most women suffer in an outside world governed by patriarchal rationale. Despite the fact that women account for a much lower percentage of inmates compared to men, ranging between 2% and 10%, the numbers of women inmates are significantly and disproportionately increasing¹. This is due to several factors, including the fact that women do not enjoy many of their economic and social rights, which hinders their access to justice. Moreover, women are often subject to discriminatory legislation, let alone the philosophy behind most legislation is to punish women for actions deemed "detrimental to public order or social morals", which renders them disproportionately prone to incarceration. Against this backdrop, this study by Nazra for Feminist Studies aims to shed light on some aspects of women's situation in prisons and detention centers, analyze a number of contexts which may lead to the incarceration of women, and address the consequences of their incarceration and post-release situation. Therefore, it is important to look at the situation of women in criminal justice systems in general in order to delineate a more comprehensive picture for better analysis of gaps and shortfalls, and consequently proposing recommendations which may assist in improving conditions to address women's needs in general.

This study draws on desk reviews of most published international reports and studies regarding the situation of women in prisons and detention centers in particular, and in criminal justice systems in general. Additionally, the study relies on international standards and frameworks governing the rights of persons deprived of liberty, and published reports on the situation in Egyptian prisons, including the Prison Regulations. The study also builds on previously published testimonies², documented by Nazra for Feminist Studies, of women who were arrested and detained due to their political activism in different periods and contexts. Moreover, interviews were conducted for the purposes of this study with two political activists who spent time in Egyptian prisons. In order to protect the privacy of the women involved, only initials are used when referring to testimonies. Further, an interview was also conducted with Ragia Omran, human rights lawyer and activist, and member of the National Council for Human Rights

¹Women in Detention, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Sept. 2014

²<http://nazra.org/node/500>

(NCHR).

Through testimonies, a number of contexts were identified where there was higher possibility of violations, violence and discrimination against women during various stages of detention, including arrest, interrogation and imprisonment. Testimonies and facts were analyzed from a feminist perspective to document women's experiences and the discrimination they face in detention centers and prisons in general; taking into consideration the intersection of such discrimination with other factors such as socio-economic class, level of educational attainment, as well as type of the underlying offense. It became clear that there are certain contexts within the criminal justice system under which women are more likely to face violence and discrimination.

Discrimination Against Women in Criminal Justice Systems

The criminal justice system is “the system of practices and institutions of governments directed at upholding social control, deterring and mitigating crime, or sanctioning those who violate laws with criminal penalties and rehabilitation efforts. A criminal justice system consists of three main parts: 1. Legislative (law-making). 2. Adjudication (courts). 3) Corrections (jails, prisons, probation and parole). In the criminal justice system, these distinct agencies operate together both under the rule of law and as the principal means of maintaining the rule of law within society.”³ Analyzing the situation of women in criminal justice systems from a gender perspective, would show how women are affected differently and are faced by violence and discrimination on all levels; legislative, judicial, and on the level of policies and procedures, in addition to being stigmatized and discriminated against by society.

On the Level of Legislation and Laws:

Types of Offenses Specific to Women and Discriminatory Laws

Women are subject to so-called "moral crimes" as potential suspects, being more likely to face accusations of committing offenses deemed by society and law to be "detrimental to morals". A prominent example is the crime of adultery, which is criminalized under the Egyptian Penal Code and in several Islamic States due to the religious foundation of law and legislation. Under such systems, adultery is considered a punishable offense, while in some States the offense of rape is pardoned if the rapist marries the victim. Additionally, in most Arab States,

³[Criminal Justice - Aims and Objectives](#)". Scottish Executive Consultations

discrimination exists between men and women when it comes to proving the offense of adultery and the punishment thereof. According to the Egyptian law, for example, a man cannot be convicted of adultery except if the act was committed at the conjugal home, while a woman can be convicted of adultery no matter where the act was committed. The punishment of the wife is also harsher if she murders the husband upon catching him in the act, whereas the punishment of the husband in the reverse situation is mitigated under the pretext of "defense of honor". Women may become victims of violating customs and norms that made their way into law, as they face imprisonment for so-called "moral" crimes which are not criminal in nature, such as escaping the family house to avoid a forced marriage or to seek independence. Women can also be prosecuted for having an abortion, which is criminalized in many States under very limited exceptions such as the mother's life being in danger, even if the pregnancy was the result of rape. Additionally, there are also the so-called "vice crimes" which affect women sex workers more than their male customers. It is often the case that women sex workers are detained and referred to trial, whereas the men are released on bail. Furthermore, the participation of women in politics exposed them further to detention, harassment and sexual violence, just because of their political activism, deviation from stereotypical roles, demanding their rights and expressing their opinions. This was clearly manifested in the incidents of mass rape which targeted women protesters in a plethora of times and places since the the Revolution of January 25th 2011, by both State and non-State actors. A number of women protesters were also forced into virginity tests at the Military Prison in the wake of the events of March 9th⁴. In some States, women victims of rape are placed under preventive detention to protect them from being murdered by their families in "honor crimes".

Access to Justice, Legal Representation, and Non-Custodial Alternatives

Generally, many women are deprived of their social and economic rights, which makes it difficult for them to access the justice system. Consequently, most women prisoners belong to the poorer and less educated classes who cannot retain a lawyer to defend them, or are even unaware of their legal rights. Their situation is mostly dependent on the male members of the family who control financial resources. Looking at the types of offenses for which women are imprisoned, most can be found to be related to financial circumstances, inability to afford legal representation or alternatives to detention such as fines or release on bail, or social conditions

⁴<http://nazra.org/node/141>

pertaining to being victims of violence in their private circles⁵. For example, M.M., who spent 16 months in one prison and 3 in another because of her political activities, recounts that many women prisoners convicted of theft were domestic workers accused by their employers because they resisted sexual harassment or rape. According to a report of the National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) on a prison visit in 2013, most women prisoners were convicted of offenses such as theft, possession of drugs, embezzlement of public funds and vice crimes, in addition to homicide⁶.

According to M.M.'s testimony, most women prisoners were either defaulters or *kawahil* (sing. f. *Kahulah*). Defaulters are women who failed to pay back a sum they borrowed. Sometimes, the default relates to paltry amounts for which women face imprisonment for several years. *Kawahil* are held legally liable for the demolition without a permit of a building to which they hold title in agreement with construction contractors. Such practice is commonplace in some provinces of Egypt according to M.M.'s story, as antique buildings are illegally demolished to give room for new commercial apartment buildings. M.M. says that in most cases, women defaulters were expected to borrow money to help their family members, for example to cover expenses for the marriage of their children or help their siblings or other family members. Both families and creditors prefer women borrowers, given their vulnerability to pressure. Additionally, the women themselves are more willing to sacrifice their freedom and go to prison, in both cases of defaulters and *kawahil*, to protect their family; in fulfillment of their socially-assigned role as always willing to give sacrifice for their families. M.M. also recounts that many of the women accused of drug offenses or homicide are facing charged instead of their husbands, sons or other male family members to protect them from prison. M.M. recounts that two women prisoners were actually executed for murder while she was serving her term.

Violence Against Women and Social Stigmatization of Female Prisoners

Women prisoners suffer from stigmatization inside and outside prison, even by their own families. Despite the fact that they are sometimes imprisoned to protect their families, the same families often disown the prisoner that brought them shame by going to prison, and may refrain from visiting her. In many cases, imprisonment leads to divorce, and women are denied

⁵Women in criminal justice systems and the added value of the UN Bangkok Rules, Penal Reform International 2015

⁶<http://nchregypt.org/media/ftp/damanhour.pdf>

visitation rights if they have children. The opposite takes place of the prisoner is a man, as custom prevails where "Prison Makes a Man". Women are often more loyal to their imprisoned husbands, regularly visiting them and catering to their needs. According to the observations of Lawyer Ragia Omran, women are the majority of prison visitors. While most women criminal prisoners belong to underprivileged social classes and rarely receive visits, unlike their political counterparts who often belong to the educated middle class and receive regular support and visits from family, friends and lawyers.

On the Level of Disciplinary Policies and Procedures:

The Situation in Prisons and related Procedures

Due to the fact that most prisoners are men, all procedures and policies in prisons and detention centers, including location and architectural design of the facilities, do not pay any attention to the specific needs of women prisoners. As a result, women face many discriminatory procedures, and are more vulnerable to violence in various contexts. This is not to say by any means that men do not face violence and discrimination in prisons and detention centers. Generally, the criminal justice system in Egypt, including the legislative system and prison infrastructure, is rickety and rundown, involving many violations which undermine human rights. According to the 2013 NCHR report⁷, there are "prisons that do not have the minimum requirements for human life, and need to be totally replaced. Others can be renovated. There is also need for building new prisons which meet the minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners, considering the large increase in population". NCHR also expressed its deep concern at the "overcrowding and significant increase in numbers of inmates in Egyptian prisons, reaching double the available capacity, which represents a great burden on prison administration with regard to discipline and control. This results in giving priority to security and disciplinary aspects in prisons over the right of inmates to enjoy the minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners". Most prisons in Egypt have become "human warehouses, which runs contrary to the Egyptian Constitution which must be applied on the ground". In addition, many reports have been issued by international and local human rights organizations addressing violations and torture in detention centers and prisons⁸.

However, this study focuses mainly on the experiences of women in prisons and detention centers, and their specific needs that have long been overlooked. Even on the level of the

⁷<http://nchregypt.org/media/ftp/damanhour.pdf>

⁸<http://www.alnadeem.org/content/2016-التعذيب-أرشيف>

international community, instruments which address the rights of persons deprived of liberty do not address the particular needs of women. A prominent exception is the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) adopted in 2010, which address in detail the needs of women in prisons and detention centers according to international human rights standards⁹.

Women Prisons and their Locations

There are only five prisons for women in Egypt, all located in major Governorates, namely El Qanater prison, which covers Greater Cairo and some of the Eastern parts of the country; Damanhour Prison, which covers the Delta, Alexandria, Matrouh and El Beheira; El Menya Prison which covers Upper Egypt; and Port Said and Tanta Prisons which are smaller facilities that cannot accommodate inmates serving long sentences. The Tanta prison wards are not equipped with bathrooms, which forces women prisoners to use buckets, and that is why it was named *Segn El Gardal* (the Bucket Prison), as M.M. recounts. Among the most important complaints of women prisoners is one pertaining to the difficulties their visitors face, and the long distances between prisons and their family residences. Additionally, prisons are overcrowded and accommodate many times their original capacity. According to one testimony, Damanhour Prison has a capacity of 450 prisoners, according to Prison Regulations, but is home to more than 1,000 women prisoners. S.N., a human rights activist and defender, had to serve two years in one prison for her political activities, during which she was forced to sleep on the floor or share the bed with another prisoner because of overcrowding.

Security Procedures and Body Searches

Body searches are among the security procedures women prisoners are subjected to when entering prison. Despite the fact that the body search is conducted by a woman, it is still done in a very humiliating manner which fails to respect the physical integrity and privacy of the bodies of prisoners. It can include vaginal cavity searches, under the pretext that they may be hiding weapons, drugs or mobile phones, which is a form of sexual violence practiced against prisoners¹⁰. Both M.M. and S.N. stated that this procedure is conducted regularly, particularly with

⁹UN Bangkok Rules on women offenders and prisoners, Short guide, Penal Reform International 2013

¹⁰<http://nazra.org/node/283>

criminal women prisoners, but rarely against their political counterparts who are aware of their rights and refuse to be subjected to this procedure.

New women prisoners are also asked to undergo pregnancy tests, whether married or unmarried, with the aim of categorizing them, which constitutes a violation of their privacy. Pregnancy tests are usually conducted in an open room, and in the presence of police or prison security personnel. However, women are forced to undergo the tests when asked, less so for women political prisoners who ceaselessly demand their rights, and more for their criminal counterparts who are more resigned and accepting of the status quo, and can be easily cowed.

Prison visitors are also searched. Reem Bashiri, a woman human rights defender, recounts her experience while visiting one of the prisoners, and her feelings of humiliation at being subjected to a body search by a female prison guard who touched all her sensitive body parts in an insulting manner that did not respect her privacy¹¹.

Health and Psychological Care

Egyptian prisons in general suffer from inadequate health care for prisoners. According to a report by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), "a prisoner is not examined by a physician upon arrival at the facility, in violation of both the Egyptian law and international standards. In many cases, prisoners cannot see a physician when they need to. The number of physicians is inadequate compared to the number of prisoners, and physicians are available in prisons for insufficient periods of time, mostly limited to a single morning shift. Moreover, prison physicians are young and inexperienced, compared to health needs in prisons. Specialists are not always available in prisons, despite the high population density that requires greater availability. Discrimination is also prevalent in the prison health care system, enabling those with means or influence to receive medical services in conditions relatively better than the rest of prisoners". The report also addressed the "lack of care for women prisoners health needs in general, and pregnant women and mothers in particular, in terms of having a resident gynecologist and a pediatrician, and providing special care for childbirth, during which women suffer from the lack of medical equipment and capabilities"¹².

M.M. recounts that she was witness to two incidents, in the first of which a mother lost her baby

¹¹<http://nazra.org/node/202>

¹²<http://eipr.org/en/publications/health-egyptian-prisons-field-study-determinants-health-behind-bars>

because the prison administration refused to listen to her and have her baby examined by a physician. The other incident involved a woman who was forced to give birth in the prison ward due to prison staff tardiness in taking her to the university hospital in the Governorate in which the prison is located, which also suffers from limited capabilities anyway. S.N. recounts that medication was not made available to women prisoners with cancer, often diverted and sold by some members of prison staff.

Prisons do not take into account providing sanitary pads for women to deal with their menstrual cycle, which leads to increased spread of diseases. Moreover, prisons do not provide women and their children with adequate nutrition, particularly with regard to women prisoners who are pregnant or breast feeding. They are left to depend on what they receive in visits or what they can buy from other prisoners, or what they can get through solidarity between inmates.

There are also no psychologists to deal with prisoners suffering from psychological disorders, particularly as women are more vulnerable to trauma and mental disorders due to the violence and exploitation they suffer outside prison. M.M. recounts the tale of a prisoner who suffered from psychological disorder and always woke up screaming. The prison administration allowed other prisoners to beat her and lock her up, instead of providing the necessary care. S.N. herself went through a troubled period during which she tried to commit suicide a few times, and prison administration did not provide psychological support. However, she managed to get psychological support from a psychiatrist outside prison, and was allowed to take drugs under his supervision. The psychiatrist was provided by human rights organizations supporting her as a political prisoner and a human rights defender.

Prison Activities and Rehabilitation Programs

Women prisoners are allowed a certain number of hours every day to get out of the cells during daylight for what is called exercise, often between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. However, according to the testimonies of M.M. and S.N., women political prisoners are allowed to exercise for only two hours a day, in order to avoid any contact between them and their criminal counterparts, particularly in a certain prison in which women political and criminal prisoners are segregated in separate wards. Yet in another prison, and due to lack of space, such segregation was not possible. M.M. believes that interacting with women criminal prisoners was good for her, as she could listen to their problems, try to help them, and try to cater to their needs, particularly for women who never received visitors.

Additionally, there are no rehabilitation or training programs, but rather volunteer efforts by skilled or talented women prisoners who volunteer to teach drawing, sewing or handicrafts. However, according to the testimonies of M.M. and S.N., prison administration does not allow all prisoners to participate in these activities, particularly political prisoners. Also, a limited number of prisoners are allowed to bring the materials needed for such activities.

S.N. says that in one prison, there is a workshop which produces prison uniforms for men and women, but only employs skilled prisoners, without any training or rehabilitation efforts on part of the administration. Mock exhibitions of handicrafts are only held when NCHR is visiting, or when an inspection by the Prosecution Service is expected, and any revenues generated go to the prison administration.

Visits and Contact with the Outside World

Women political prisoners often get support and solidarity from their families, friends, comrades, and lawyers. As for the rest of the prisoners, most of them do not receive any visits, and their relationship with their lawyers, if they have any, is limited to the lawyer attending court hearings. In addition to social stigmatization, which causes some families to refrain from visiting their female prisoners, there is also the financial factor which hinders even willing families from visiting. Lawyer Ragia Omran says "Subsistence in prison by families is really expensive, and in the lowest estimate, ranges from 500 to 700 Egyptian Pounds. This comes on top of transportation costs, particularly as women prisons are limited and located in distant areas that force visitors to travel for long distances". Furthermore, the visits are too short when compared to the hardship and waiting hours visitors have to endure to be able to see the inmates. Women political prisoners can also be denied visits for an unlimited period of time without any justification, and in some cases, visits are limited to first and second degree relatives only, as was the case with M.M.

Bodily Integrity and Physical and Sexual Violence

Women Prisoners face physical and verbal abuse by prison guards or administration, particularly when fights erupt in the wards, or when the administration believes that prisoners have violated prison regulations. In some cases, prisoners are placed in solitary confinement for a period determined by the prison Warden; which could be days or even months. Incidents of sexual

harassment may occur, either at the hand of other women prisoners or prison staff. S.N. recounts how she was sexually harassed by another older woman prisoner, with no action and even complicity by prison administration. When a fight erupted between her and the harasser and she insisted on complaining to the Warden, her reward was two days in solitary confinement. M.M. also tells how women criminal prisoners were sexually harassed by the prison physician. She recounts that he tried to harass a political prisoner, and she filed a complaint against him. M.M. believes that the criminal prisoners are often exploited and harassed due to their fear and vulnerability as they have to keep silent about such crimes. Also, prior to any NCHR visit, women prisoners are warned that they should remain silent and not to complain to the visitors of any violations, or they will be punished. Prison administration also ensures that NCHR delegations are not allowed in the wards of political prisoners, fearing that they will not remain silent.

While there is a possibility that women will face violations of sexual nature inside prisons, the likelihood of such violations is greater in other contexts preceding incarceration, starting with arrest, transfer trucks, police stations and provisional detention.

During Arrest

According to testimonies previously published by Nazra for Feminist Studies documenting the violations committed against women human rights defenders in various places during the period April-May 2016, activists were either arrested randomly while in marches, demonstrations or protests, or were specifically targeted and arrested in their places of residence, or from cafes and houses in Downtown Cairo. During this process, women are exposed to the risk of psychological violence through being humiliated, insulted, sworn at and called all sorts of names and physical violence in the form of beating. In many cases, they are also exposed to sexual violence through threats of rape or actual sexual harassment by police personnel or other, male or female, citizens loyal to the regime¹³.

During Transport in Transfer Trucks

Transfer may take place from the place of arrest to the police stations, from the stations to the prosecution office, or from prison to court. In all these contexts, accused women are under the

¹³<http://nazra.org/node/500>

mercy of members of the police or investigation personnel, who may beat, insult, swear at, sexually harass or threaten them with rape. The trip may take long hours, which allows for violations to occur unhindered. S.N. tells how, during one of her trips from prison to court in a transfer truck, she was accompanied by some women criminal prisoners. The police assistant accompanying the prisoners gave one of them a red pill. After she took it, he took her aside in the privacy of the outside area where police assistants stand, and closed the door to the interior of the truck. After a while, the door was opened and they both returned readjusting their clothes.

Another testimony documented by Nazra for Feminist studies recounts how, during the arrest of one woman demonstrator, she was forcibly shoved inside a Central Security Force (CSF) armored truck, beaten and dragged inside and outside the truck, and orally raped inside the truck. "There were four soldiers in the truck. One of them did not touch me, and was crying aside. The other three were sexually assaulting me, and one of them was forcing me to kiss him. My jeans were pulled down to my knees, and my shirt buttons were open. The officer boarded the truck and told the soldiers to step aside. He asked me: 'So I am not a man?' 'Yes,' I retorted, 'you are not a man.' At that time, I had fallen on my back. He lowered his trousers and forced his body (penis) inside my mouth, his feet on my hands, he kissed me several times and I scratched his cheeks. He continued to move his body in and out of my mouth 3 times. He was masked, clearly a member of the Special Forces, and I was scratching his cheeks to push him away and attempting to reveal his face. I still dream of his eyes until this moment..."

In Police Stations and Detention Centers

Police stations are among the worst places in which women face a higher risk of physical and sexual abuse, particularly as all staff members in these stations are men. For body searches, police assistants or investigation unit personnel order a senior women prisoner to body search new ones. Searches are done in a very inhumane manner, in a place that has no privacy whatsoever, and where those present, both men and women, can watch. They are also treated in a humiliating manner, their mobile phones confiscated, and they are denied the right to communicate with the outside world. When there is need to spend the night in the station, prisoners are forced to sleep under inhumane conditions in places that lack ventilation. They may be sexually harassed or spied on by police assistants, or sexually harassed by other inmates in the same cell. Additionally, police assistants could storm in the cell without any warning or asking for permission. Women may remain under custody for years in an environment surrounded by men. There is also the *Habskhana* or *Takhshiba*, which is basically a temporary detention room where prisoners are housed during transfer from one prison to another, to the prosecution office,

or prior to release. In addition to poor ventilation, limited space and lack of cleanliness, prisoners are exposed to additional insults by being forced to undergo the humiliating body search experience one more time. According to M.M.'s testimony, women prisoners are forced to defecate on the floor to prove that they are not hiding anything in their insides, and are not allowed out of the detention room until they do so.

As what happens in prisons and detention centers is an extension of the prevailing culture in society and practices of the State in other fields of life, the discrimination and violations women face will vary and intersect with other factors such as socio-economic class and level of educational attainment. Though generally patriarchal and abusive, treatment by police officers and assistants and prison administration personnel would vary based on women's socio-economic class and level of educational attainment.

Despite the fact that this study relied on the testimonies of women political prisoners, their experiences are truly inspiring, due to their ability to detect manifestations of injustice and exploitation in the different stages of their incarceration, their awareness of their rights, and their brave opposition to these violations. By virtue of being women human rights defenders, their interest was not limited to what happens to women political prisoners, but also to their fellow criminal inmates. Experiences of women political prisoners were the window through which we could have access to the experiences of women criminal prisoners, particularly in light of the challenges this study faced in terms of lack of information and statistics regarding women's situation in prisons and detention centers. Such information is difficult to obtain, as there is no research regarding the situation of women in prisons and their specific needs in the local context. Moreover, it was not possible to conduct field visits or communicate directly with women prisoners.

General Recommendations for Improving the Situation of Women in the Criminal Justice System

Having reviewed experiences of women prisoners and patterns of violations they faced, Nazra for Feminist Studies presents some recommendations regarding women's prisons and detention centers. These recommendations include, but are not limited to, treating women prisoners in such a manner as to ensure no discrimination among them, adherence to standards of privacy, respect for the right of physical integrity, and protection against any form of verbal, physical or sexual violence. Furthermore, women's full enjoyment of their rights must be guaranteed. These rights

include the right to exercise, receive appropriate medical attention, non-abuse, and full visiting rights. Recommendations may be categorized as the following:

On the Legislative Level

- Working towards changing the body of discriminatory and non-protective provisions, under both Personal Status Laws and the Penal Code, which lead to higher likelihood of women facing imprisonment and being denied access to justice.
- Working towards reviewing many Articles in the Penal Code which mainly use deprivation of liberty as a penalty for minor crimes, as in the case of female defaulters, to be replaced by non-custodial measures. This should be done while taking into consideration the provision of Article 11 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR): "No one shall be imprisoned merely on the ground of inability to fulfill a contractual obligation".
- Working towards reviewing the extent to which Prison Regulations, as amended by NCHR¹⁴ in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior in September 2014, are being applied, with a view to further amendment or addition of articles so as to guarantee the rights of women prisoners.
- Establishing a committee to bring together representative of NCHR, State agencies responsible for the management of women's prisons and centers of detention, the National Council for Women (NCW), and civil society to monitor the extent to which Prison Regulations are implemented in reality, and hold violators who commit crimes against women prisoners, or State officials who violate the Regulations, accountable for their crimes and violations. The committee should also issue an annual gender-sensitive report on the results of its work.
- Amending the Law on the National Council for Women, to give NCW the mandate to conduct prison visits and put together fact-finding missions.

Recommendations regarding the Police

¹⁴<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/530881>

- Dealing with women prisoners professionally, and applying international human rights standards when arresting women suspects, respecting the privacy and integrity of their bodies, and refraining from the use of violence.
- Establishing committees under the Department for combating Violence against Women of the Ministry of Interior, at every police station and directorate, with the aim of ensuring adherence to international human rights standards.
- Granting women prisoners the right to contact their families and lawyers, as guaranteed by the Constitution.
- Abolishing manual body searches and installing electronic scanners to detect contraband, such as drugs, sharp instruments and mobile phones, to avoid any unnecessary contact, and conducting searches in places which protect the privacy and integrity of the human body.

Recommendations regarding Prison Administrations

- Allowing all women prisoners access to Prison Regulations, both in writing and in audible form, to ensure that they are aware of their rights and duties, with a view to guarantee that they are not abused by other inmates or prison workers. This can also be achieved through introducing them to the Regulations and keeping a copy posted at the prison library.
- Ensuring that female staff are employed in women prisons, instead of relying on more senior prisoners for a variety of tasks. New women employees should be trained, provided with psychological and legal support. Policies should be developed and implemented to protect them from discrimination and sexual harassment while discharging their duties.
- Ensuring that women prisoners are not arbitrarily denied their rights to exercise, receive visitors, communicate with the outside world, access their belongings and frequent the prison library.
- Facilitating exam-taking for women prisoners who wish to pursue their education.
- Cooperating with the Bar Association to provide women prisoners with pro bono legal

support, as most women are not able to obtain legal support because of their ignorance of their rights and/or economic hardship.

- Providing health care and other medical and psychological services to women prisoners, while taking into consideration the specific needs of women, particularly pregnant women and mothers.
- Organizing activities and establishing training workshops to develop the women prisoners as human capital, through productive work through which they can earn an income.
- Working towards ensuring that women prisoners serve their sentences in prisons closer to their places of residence, in order to facilitate family visits.

General Recommendations

- Training criminal justice system professionals, including judges, lawyers, police officers and prison administration personnel, on international human rights standards. Mainstreaming the gender perspective, according to international standards and protocols, while taking into consideration the specific needs of women as provided for in the 2010 Bangkok Rules.
- Allowing monitoring bodies, both local, such as NCHR, NCW and relevant civil society organizations, and international organizations to conduct unannounced prison visits to ensure the credibility of the findings; and allowing visiting delegations to communicate with prisoners and hear their complaints without the presence of any personnel from the prison administration.
- Conducting more local research on the situation of women in the criminal justice system, including prisons and detention centers, particularly in light of the scarcity of studies and information available in this field. Furthermore, studies should also address the causes and policies which promote discrimination and violence against women, and their impact on women, their families, and society as a whole.

It should be noted that all of the above cannot be achieved in the absence of a political will that takes it upon its shoulders to reform the security apparatus and totally restructure security agencies in accordance with the articles and provisions of the Egyptian Constitution and

international human rights standards to which Egypt is bound.

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