

Table of Contents

- ***Egypt issues law allowing president to appoint judges***
- ***The Guardian view on the release of the al-Jazeera journalists***
- ***Egyptian Christians bridle at prison terms for Copts only in fatal clash***
- ***Egypt's key player: Saudi Arabia***
- ***Totally unacceptable that NGO workers in Egypt are sentenced to jail***
- ***Statement by the Muslim Brotherhood on CEDAW***
- ***Eritrean hostage given five day ultimatum by Sinai traffickers***
- ***Egyptian court overturns conviction of popular comedian of offending Islam***
- ***Egypt's sexual harassment of women 'epidemic'***
- ***Mob attacks women at anti-sexual assault rally in Egypt***
- ***Egyptian activists to continue struggle against 'virginity test' perpetrators***

Egypt issues law allowing president to appoint judges

Reuters (28.04.2017) - <http://reut.rs/2p4eEHP> - Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has ratified legal amendments that allow the president to make judicial appointments to its top courts, a move judges said would erode the independence of the judicial system.

Parliament passed the amendments on Wednesday but some judges had called on Sisi to hold off on ratifying them, calling the amendments an unconstitutional breach of separation of powers.

The amendments were issued on Thursday in the official gazette, formally passing them into law.

Elected in 2014 after leading the military's 2013 overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood's President Mohamed Mursi, Sisi has deflected Western criticism that he has suppressed political opposition and human rights and has sought to present himself as an indispensable bulwark against terrorism in the Middle East.

Egypt's judiciary has long enjoyed a degree of independence. But judges say a crackdown on the judiciary that started in 2014 has aimed at bringing it under tighter government control.

The amendments stipulate that each court nominate three of its most senior members for leadership, one of whom the president will choose to be its head.

This is a departure from the old system, in which leadership generally passed to the court's most senior member and the president signed off in a largely ceremonial role.

Egypt's judges club, an informal professional association, said on Wednesday it would hold an emergency meeting on May 5 to discuss how to move forward after parliament passed the law. It called on Sisi at the time not to ratify it.

Supporters of the amendments say they are necessary to strengthen Sisi's authority on critical issues such as combating Islamist militants.

Sisi declared a three-month state of emergency nationwide this month after two Islamic State suicide bombings at churches in Tanta and Alexandria killed at least 45.

The Guardian view on the release of the al-Jazeera journalists

The Guardian (15.02.2015) - <http://bit.ly/2pBnGgA> - The release of [the two al-Jazeera journalists](#) who had remained in detention after Peter Grete, their Australian colleague, was freed and then deported, is good news for them and for their families. But the good news ends there, because anybody who thinks that this is an indication that the Egyptian legal system under President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi is about delivering justice needs to look beyond this high-profile case at the plight of the thousands of men and women in Egypt whose chances of any redress for false arrest, trumped-up charges, puffed-up evidence and mistreatment by the police or the military are remote or non-existent.

Bent law is bent law, and the fact that law that has been bent to send innocent men to jail can later be bent back to get them out is not justice, but expediency. The international outcry at their arrest and detention meant that the diplomatic costs had become so high that the Egyptian regime needed to get them out of prison, and out of the media spotlight, as soon as possible. This does not mean that the appeal court, which took the decision, did not act correctly. The point is that it did so knowing in advance that it was a decision the government would welcome.

This is the same legal system that has dismissed or overturned all the convictions of the former president, Hosni Mubarak, his sons and many of his close allies and advisers. It is the same legal system that has sent hundreds to jail for taking part in peaceful protests. It is the same legal system that, in other cases where there had indeed been violence, has used that fact to charge and detain many whose involvement was taken as given on the flimsiest of evidence. It is the same legal system that itself pre-emptively uses violence, firing on protesters, and in some instances killing them, when they gather in the streets. The death last month of the young leftist poet [Shaimaa el-Sabbagh](#), as she walked in a peaceful procession toward Tahrir Square, was the product of such police tactics. But, even though an inquiry has been announced, where are the police officers who should be before the courts for the reckless and unprovoked use of firearms, or at least under suspension until the inquiry is complete?

Once in prison, the average detainee faces a standard routine of [abuse, beating and sometimes torture](#), as well as dismal physical conditions. This is forbidden by the Egyptian constitution. It is a crime, but not a crime that often comes before the courts. Those courts once had a reputation for independence, but that changed under Mubarak, who made changes to personnel and to the rules on the appointment of judges which over time left mainly pliant men on the bench, ready either to take "guidance" on cases or to accommodate what they imagined would be the government's desires. They were also ready to accept evidence from police witnesses without questioning its veracity.

The released journalists were VIP detainees. Their treatment was bad, but bearable. The situation of more ordinary detainees is worse. Very few of them can look forward to being rescued in the way in which the al-Jazeera three have been.

Egyptian Christians bridle at prison terms for Copts only in fatal clash

The New York Times (15.12.2013) - Three Coptic Christians in Egypt were given long prison sentences on Sunday over the death of a Muslim in a sectarian clash even though no one has been prosecuted in the deaths of at least five Christians in the same clash, raising allegations that the military-backed government was breaking its promise to curb bias against Christians.

Beshoy Tamry, a Coptic Christian activist with the Maspero Youth Union, said many Christians had hoped for more equitable treatment after Egypt's Islamist president, Mohamed Morsi, was ousted in July. "But today proved that nothing changed," he said. "The regime has not changed its system of using the judiciary against Christians."

The clashes began in April in Khusus, a town north of Cairo, after Muslim children spray-painted a swastika on the wall of an Islamic institute, according to local news reports. Some local Muslims wrongly blamed their Christian neighbors and attacked them.

At least six Muslims were convicted on Sunday of vandalizing churches and Christian property in Khusus and given sentences of three or five years. But no one has been charged in the deaths of the five Christians. By contrast, one Christian was sentenced to 25 years in prison and two others to 15 years for their roles in the death of one Muslim in the same fight, state news media reported.

The events in Khusus set off the worst outbreak of sectarian violence in Egypt during Mr. Morsi's year in office. Two days later, angry Christians emerged from a funeral at the main Coptic cathedral in Cairo and were met by a crowd of Muslims from the area. The Christians were forced back onto the cathedral grounds, and scores of young men on each side hurled rocks and firebombs for several hours; some fired birdshot and, in a few instances, handguns. Police officers who had arrived stood among the crowd outside the cathedral and fired tear gas onto the grounds.

A more deadly episode erupted before Mr. Morsi's tenure, in the period of direct military rule after the 2011 overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak. In October that year, military and security forces clashed with demonstrators outside the Maspero state media building, most of them Coptic Christians; more than two dozen were killed, including some crushed by military vehicles. Three soldiers were convicted of manslaughter in those deaths, and each was sentenced to less than three years in prison.

Another burst of sectarian violence followed Mr. Morsi's ouster. Islamists blamed Christians for the military takeover and mounted a wave of attacks on churches across the country.

Egypt's key player: Saudi Arabia

By Emily Dyer and Olivier Guitta

Henry Jackson Society (16.08.2013) - The international reaction to Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's violent crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood has been more or less the same, at least publicly.

Condemning the regime for the violence, while asking for a diplomatic solution, has been the U.S. and the EU's approach. But one country has remained silent so far and it is the key actor in the crisis: Saudi Arabia.

As long as Riyadh continues to bankroll the new regime throughout the interim period, General al-Sisi will not take American diplomatic efforts seriously, simply because he does not need to. The cancellation of military exercises by the US is just a symbolic gesture. Even withdrawing the yearly \$1.3 billion in aid from Washington may be met by a shrug from al-Sisi. In fact, Saudi Arabia has pledged to cover that shortfall, if the US decided to go ahead with this threat.

At this point, it is an understatement to say that President Obama has no leverage over al-Sisi. The proof is the fact that his administration - from Defense Secretary Hagel to Secretary of State Kerry - have made no headway whatsoever in their attempts to find a diplomatic exit to this crisis.

Despite recent reports of Saudi Arabia offering asylum to Mohamed Morsi, its support for the Egyptian military, even after the violent crackdown, is not going anywhere any time soon.

Saudi Arabia is thought to have been heavily involved in President Morsi's ouster, partly due to its rivalry with the Muslim Brotherhood's key financier, Qatar, for regional influence in the Gulf. Just days after Morsi was overthrown, Egypt's new leaders received a \$12 billion aid package from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait, and gas shortages that had been plaguing Morsi's Egypt for months suddenly stopped. Saudi Arabia, with whom General al-Sisi has longstanding connections having been the military attaché in Riyadh, offered its continued support throughout the interim period.

There is no love lost between Saudi Arabia and its Gulf partners, in particular the UAE, on one side and the Muslim Brotherhood on the other. And one can suspect that Saudi Arabia is quite keen on having the Egyptian army do the "dirty work" of eradicating the Muslim Brotherhood.

While the Muslim Brotherhood could have certainly profited from a major gain of sympathy from both the Egyptian street and the international community, the fact that they engaged in violence - attacking three Coptic churches - killed their credibility.

Also placing women and children at the front of the protests, as potential human shields, was not really a major public relations coup.

Being involved, one way or another, in terrorism in Northern Sinai - through Ansar al Jihad - is the cherry on the cake. In fact, since Morsi's ouster on July 3rd, terrorism in the Sinai has skyrocketed, including the killing of seven Egyptian soldiers on August 15.

As if to prove its involvement, Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohamed Beltagy recently stated that terrorist attacks in Sinai will stop as soon as Morsi is reinstated as president.

The question remains now how far will the crackdown go and how much will the Muslim Brotherhood be able to retaliate. At this juncture, it looks that the Muslim Brotherhood has a lot of very well-armed and well-trained elements in its midst to inflict damage to the government forces.

General al-Sisi's cold shoulder towards the U.S. certainly matches the widespread anti-American feeling on the streets, largely due to Obama's support for the Muslim Brotherhood rather than the June 30th protesters. Al-Sisi therefore gains legitimacy among the Egyptian people every time he speaks out against Obama and, as long as Saudi Arabia continues to send support to Egypt, he will continue to use full force against

those who threaten the army's interests. But the question remains whether Riyadh will sustain Washington's forthcoming pressure.

Emily Dyer is a Research Fellow at the Henry Jackson Society, where Olivier Guitta is the Director of Research.

Totally unacceptable that NGO workers in Egypt are sentenced to jail

ALDE (04.06.2013) - Today an Egyptian criminal court has sentenced 43 people to between one and five years in prison for working for unregistered NGOs in Egypt. Twenty-seven defendants, all of whom were tried in absentia, received five-year jail sentences. Of the defendants who attended the trial, 11 received one-year suspended sentences, and five received two-year sentences.

They were referred to trial in December 2011 on charges of illegally obtaining foreign funds and failing to register their operations with the Egyptian government. The court also ordered the closure of four foreign NGOs operating in Egypt and for their funds to be confiscated. These are the US-based Freedom House, the International Democratic Institute, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and Germany's Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS).

Guy Verhofstadt, ALDE group leader: *"It is totally unacceptable that Egypt, calling itself democratic now, is using a law from Mubarak to organize a crackdown on NGO's that are there to support democracy. First refusing to register these NGO's for many years and then jailing there employees because they work for a not registered NGO is a tactic from a dictatorship not a democratic government. Closing down NGO offices is closing down the revolution. This is again a reason for the EU to cut its funding to Egypt until it respects basic democratic rules."*

Edward McMillan-Scott (Lib Dems, UK): *"Closing down NGOs that empower civil society is an attempt to silence everyone who wants to build a democratic society. This is the complete opposite of what the Egyptian revolution was about. The trial was politicized from the very beginning. It is clear that the so-called independence of the Egyptian judges is no more than a farce."*

Marietje Schaake (D66, Netherlands): *"These 43 people stood on trial based on Mubarak's NGO law. This government is right now finalizing a new NGO law that is even worse. The EU must stand firm on its principles of democracy and human rights and stop aid to Egypt if this new NGO law is adopted. In the EU-Egypt Taskforce we set some conditions. If the EU wants to retain some credibility, it must show it means what it says."*

Statement by the Muslim Brotherhood on CEDAW

(13.03.2013) - Statement of the Muslim Brotherhood about The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which violates all principles of the Islamic Sharia and the Islamic community. The Muslim Brotherhood call upon rulers of Islamic countries and Foreign Ministers and their representatives in the

United Nations to reject this document, and also we invite this organization to live up to the level of the pure family relations prescribed by Islam.

In the name of God the Merciful

Statement of the Muslim Brotherhood about The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which violates all principles of the Islamic Sharia and the Islamic community

The Commission on the Status of Women holds a conference in the period from the 4th to the 15th of March 2013 to approve a document titled (The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), a deceptive headline that includes items collide with the principles of Islam and its basic unanimous elements of Quran and Sunnah, destroy Islamic ethics, and seek to demolish the institution of the family, which the Egyptian constitution confirmed it is the building block of the society, and hence achieve the dismantling of the community, and end to the last step of the intellectual and cultural invasion, and eliminate the privacy that preserve elements of Islamic societies and its cohesion.

It is enough to give a closer reading at these items to realize what is meant to us, and these items are:

1. Grant girls their complete sexual freedom, as well as the freedom to choose their sex and the freedom to choose their sex partners (i.e., choose to have a normal sexual relationship or atypical) with rising the age of marriage.
2. Provide contraception for adolescent girls and train them on how to use it with the legalization of abortion to abort undesirable pregnancy under the name of sexual and reproduction rights.
3. Equality between an adulterous and a wife, and equality between adultery children (outside of marriage children) and legitimate sons in all rights.
4. Granting homosexuals all their rights, protection and respect, and grant protection for women in prostitution.
5. Grant wives all the right to sue their husbands with charges of rape or harassment, and the competent authorities should grant same penalties similar to raping or harassing a stranger.
6. Equality in inheritance.
7. Replace guardianship with partnership, and fully share the roles within the family between men and women such as: spending, child care, home affairs.
8. Equal access to the marriage legislations such as: Stop polygamy, Iddah, mandate, and the dowry, and stop obligatory spending of man on the family, and to allow Muslim women to marry a non-Muslim and others.
9. Withdraw the authority of divorce from husbands and authorize it to judiciary and share property after divorce.
10. Cancel the obligatory authorization of the husband in: travel, work or going out or use contraception.

These are the destructive means of the institution of the family and community that calls for the return for the first ignorance.

The Muslim Brotherhood call upon rulers of Islamic countries and Foreign Ministers and their representatives in the United Nations to reject this document, and also we invite this organization to live up to the level of the pure family relations prescribed by Islam.

Also Muslim Brotherhood calls al-Azhar to act according to its leading role and to condemn this document and declare the position of Islam towards its articles, as it is the reference for Muslims.

As well we call other Islamic groups and associations to take a decisive stand against this document and the like.

We also call for women's organizations to adhere to their religion and the morals of their communities and the elements of our social life and not to be seduced by the deceptive, misleading and destructive calls for urbanization.

The Muslim Brotherhood

Eritrean hostage given five day ultimatum by Sinai traffickers

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (21.11.2012) - CSW has learned that an Eritrean refugee held hostage by Bedouin traffickers for three months has been given five days to raise US\$25,000 or face illegal organ harvesting. His case highlights a continuing lack of protection and assistance for refugees and migrants from the Horn of Africa, who are routinely abducted and abused by people traffickers in the Sinai Peninsular.

Twenty-two year old Philemon Semere escaped from Eritrea to Ethiopia in 2010, where he sang in the church choir in Adi Harish Refugee Camp. Early in 2012, he travelled to Sudan and was attempting to reach Israel when he was abducted by Rashaida traffickers and taken to one of several torture and extortion facilities in the Sinai. He was beaten and abused regularly and at that time his captors asked him to source US\$ 33,000 to ensure his release, or lose a kidney.

In October, Mr Semere was moved to another facility where he was subjected to electric shock torture, amongst other things. This morning his captors informed him he had five days to either produce US\$ 25,000 or lose a kidney.

In a telephone conversation with CSW's Special Ambassador, Rev Stuart Windsor, a clearly distraught Mr. Semere confirmed that "if they don't get the money, they will kill me in five days".

The abduction, torture and extortion of refugees in purpose-built facilities in the Sinai has been extensively documented since 2010. Hostages are generally bound for extended periods; deprived of adequate food; given salty water to drink, and tortured using extreme methods, including electric shocks and branding, while friends and relatives are obliged to listen via telephone to their screams and pleas for assistance. Women are particularly vulnerable to abuse, including gang-rape. Some hostages have been used as slave labour. Initially, demands for payment ranged between US\$3000 and US\$8000, but have increased enormously. When payments are not forthcoming, vital organs are illegally harvested in unhygienic conditions, generally resulting in the death of the person concerned.

CSW's Special Ambassador Stuart Windsor said, "Our heartfelt prayers are with Philemon Semere as he faces this horrific ultimatum. The abduction and torture of human beings for profit and the illegal traffic in their organs is one of the most abhorrent forms of modern slavery and an appalling affront to human dignity. The continuation of this phenomenon is a terrible indictment of the failure of several signatories to international and regional refugee conventions to provide adequate protection for this vulnerable community. CSW urges the Egyptian authorities to act decisively to rescue Semere and others in his position, and to combat trafficking by ensuring perpetrators are brought to justice. However, we also recognise that trafficking is an international crime that spans national borders, and therefore call for concerted international action to bring this appalling phenomenon to an end."

Egyptian court overturns conviction of popular comedian of offending Islam

Associated Press (12.09.2012) - An Egyptian appeals court has overturned the conviction of one of the Arab world's most famous comedians, who had been sentenced to jail for insulting Islam in his movies.

Adel Imam had appealed a three-month jail sentence and a fine he received after an ultraconservative Islamist lawyer sued him for portraying Islamists in a bad light. On Wednesday, the court said the lawyer was not personally harmed by the movies and had no standing to sue.

Such suits aren't new to Egypt— and have often been ignored by courts. But many worry that, with the rising power of Islamists following the toppling of Hosni Mubarak, such cases may be used to curb free expression.

Imam, 71, is known for movies ranging from romantic comedies to films tackling corruption and extremism.

Egypt's sexual harassment of women 'epidemic'

Campaigners in Egypt say the problem of sexual harassment is reaching epidemic proportions, with a rise in such incidents over the past three months. For many Egyptian women, sexual harassment - which sometimes turns into violent mob-style attacks - is a daily fact of life, reports the BBC's Bethany Bell in Cairo.

BBC News (03.09.2012) - Last winter, an Egyptian woman was assaulted by a crowd of men in the city of Alexandria.

In video footage of the incident, posted on the internet, she is hauled over men's shoulders and dragged along the ground, her screams barely audible over the shouts of the mob.

It is hard to tell who is attacking her and who is trying to help.

The case was one of the most extreme - but surveys say many Egyptian women face some form of sexual harassment every day.

Marwa, not her real name, says she worries about being groped or verbally harassed whenever she goes downtown. She says it makes her afraid.

"This is something that scares me, as a girl. When I want to go out, walking the street and someone harasses or annoys me, it makes me afraid.

"This stops me from going out. I try to be excessively cautious in the way I dress so I avoid wearing things that attract people."

'Deeply rooted'

The day I met Marwa, she was wearing a long headscarf pinned like a wimple under her chin, and a loose flowing dress with long sleeves over baggy trousers.

But dressing conservatively is no longer a protection, according to Dina Farid of the campaign group Egypt's Girls are a Red Line.

She says even women who wear the full-face veil - the niqab - are being targeted.

"It does not make a difference at all. Most of Egyptian ladies are veiled [with a headscarf] and most of them have experienced sexual harassment.

"Statistics say that most of the women or girls who have been sexually harassed have been veiled or completely covered up with the niqab."

Harassers are getting younger, campaigners say

In 2008, a study by the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights found that more than 80% of Egyptian women have experienced sexual harassment, and that the majority of the victims were those who wore Islamic headscarves.

Said Sadek, a sociologist from the American University in Cairo, says that the problem is deeply rooted in Egyptian society: a mixture of what he calls increasing Islamic conservatism, on the rise since the late 1960s, and old patriarchal attitudes.

"Religious fundamentalism arose, and they began to target women. They want women to go back to the home and not work.

"Male patriarchal culture does not accept that women are higher than men, because some women had education and got to work, and some men lagged behind and so one way to equalise status is to shock women and force a sexual situation on them anywhere.

"It is not the culture of the Pharaohs; it is the culture of the Bedouins," Mr Sadek says.

Mr Sadek and women's campaign groups also blame what they call the lack of security enforcement. They say the police should do more to enforce laws protecting women from harassment.

'Provocative dress'

And the harassers are getting younger and younger.

On the Qasr al-Nil bridge in central Cairo, a hotspot for harassment, I met a group of teenage boys hanging out near street stalls blaring loud music.

When I asked them about a recent case of mass harassment in which women at a park were groped by a gang of boys, they told me the girls brought it on themselves.

"If the girls were dressed respectably, no-one would touch them," one of them said. "It's the way girls dress that makes guys come on to them. The girls came wanting it - even women in niqab."

One of his friends told me the boys were not to blame, and that there was a difference between women who wore loose niqabs and tight ones.

A woman who wore a tight niqab was up for it, he added.

But attitudes like these horrify many Egyptian men - like Hamdy, a human rights activist.

"I really feel very upset myself because I think about my family, my sisters and my mother," he said.

"Before Eid [the festival at the end of Ramadan], I was downtown and I had my sisters with me. It gets very crowded and I had my eyes everywhere, looking around and I shouted at a pedlar who got in their way. In our religion this is something that is not allowed."

The new government says it is taking the problem seriously - although many campaigners argue it is not a priority yet.

For women - like Nancy, who lives in central Cairo - it is a question of freedom.

"I want to walk safely and like a human being. Nobody should touch or harass me - that's it."

Mob attacks women at anti-sexual assault rally in Egypt

A mob of hundreds of men assaulted women holding a march demanding an end to sexual harassment Friday, with the attackers overwhelming the male guardians and groping and molesting several of the female marchers in Cairo's Tahrir Square.

By Amr Nabil

USA Today (09.06.2012) - From the ferocity of the assault, some of the victims said it appeared to have been an organized attempt to drive women out of demonstrations and trample on the pro-democracy protest movement.

The attack follows smaller scale assaults on women this week in Tahrir, the epicenter of the uprising that forced Hosni Mubarak to step down last year. Thousands have been gathering in the square this week in protests over a variety of issues - mainly over worries that presidential elections this month will secure the continued rule by elements of Mubarak's regime backed by the ruling military.

Earlier in the week, an Associated Press reporter witnessed around 200 men assault a woman who eventually fainted before men trying to help could reach her.

Friday's march was called to demand an end to sexual assaults. Around 50 women participated, surrounded by a larger group of male supporters who joined hands to form a protective ring around them. The protesters carried posters saying, "The people want to cut the hand of the sexual harasser," and chanted, "The Egyptian girl says it loudly, harassment is barbaric."

After the marchers entered a crowded corner of the square, a group of men waded into the women, heckling them and groping them. The male supporters tried to fend them off, and it turned into a melee involving a mob of hundreds.

The marchers tried to flee while the attackers chased them and male supporters tried to protect them. But the attackers persisted, cornering several women against a metal sidewalk railing, including an Associated Press reporter, shoving their hands down their clothes and trying to grab their bags. The male supporters fought back, swinging belts and fists and throwing water.

Eventually, the women were able to reach refuge in a nearby building with the mob still outside until they finally got out to safety.

"After what I saw and heard today. I am furious at so many things. Why beat a girl and strip her off? Why?" wrote Sally Zohney, one of the organizers of the event on Twitter.

The persistence of the attack raised the belief of many that it was intentional, though who orchestrated it was unclear.

Mariam Abdel-Shahid, a 25-year-old cinema student who took part in the march, said "sexual harassment will only take us backward."

"This is pressure on the woman to return home," she said.

Ahmed Mansour, a 22-year-old male medical student who took part in the march, said there are "people here trying to abuse the large number of women protesters who feel safe and secure. Some people think it is targeted to make women hate coming here."

"I am here to take a position and to object to this obscene act in society," he said.

Assaults on women in Tahrir have been a demoralizing turn for Egypt's protest movement.

During the 18-day uprising against Mubarak last year, women say they briefly experienced a "new Egypt," with none of the harassment that is common in Cairo's streets taking place in Tahrir. Women participated in the anti-Mubarak uprising as leading activists, protesters, medics and even fighters to ward off attacks by security agents or affiliated thugs. They have continued the role during the frequent protests over the past 15 months against the military, which took power after Mubarak's fall on Feb. 11, 2011.

But women have also been targeted, both by mobs and by military and security forces in crackdowns, a practice commonly used by Mubarak security against protesters. Lara Logan, a U.S. correspondent for CBS television, was sexually assaulted by a frenzied mob in Tahrir on the day Mubarak stepped down, when hundreds of thousands of Egyptians came to the square to celebrate.

In a defining image of the post-Mubarak state violence against women, troops dispersing a December protest in Tahrir were captured on video stripping a woman's top off down to her blue bra and stomping with their boots on her chest, as other troops pulled her by the arms across the ground.

That incident prompted an unprecedented march by some 10,000 women through central Cairo in December demanding Egypt's ruling military step down in a show of outrage

In contrast, the small size of Friday's march could reflect the vulnerability and insecurity many feel in the square, which was packed with thousands of mostly young men by nightfall Friday. Twenty rights groups signed on to support the stand and hundreds more vowed to take part, according to the Facebook page where organizers publicized the event, but only around 50 women participated.

Sexual harassment of women, including against those who wear the Islamic headscarf or even cover their face, is common in the streets of Cairo. A 2008 report by the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights says two-thirds of women in Egypt experienced sexual harassment on a daily basis. A string of mass assaults on women in 2006 during the Muslim feast following the holy month of Ramadan prompted police to increase the number of patrols to combat it but legislation providing punishment was never passed.

After Friday's attack, many were already calling for another, much larger stand in the square against such assaults.

Another participant in Friday's march, Ahmed Hawary, said a close female friend of his was attacked by a mob of men in Tahrir Square in January. She was rushed off in an ambulance, which was the only way to get her out, he said. After suffering a nervous breakdown, she left Cairo altogether to work elsewhere in Egypt.

"Women activists are at the core of the revolution," Hawary said. "They are the courage of this movement. If you break them, you break the spirit of the revolution."

Egyptian activists to continue struggle against 'virginity test' perpetrators

Lawyers, activists say they 'aren't surprised' by Sunday's not-guilty verdict in the so called 'virginity tests' case; Egypt's honour was trampled on, says plaintiff

By Nada El-Kouny

Ahramonline (11.03.2012) / HRWF (30.03.2012 - A Cairo military court on Sunday acquitted Dr. Ahmed Adel El-Mogy, a military physician, of carrying out "virginity tests" on seven female activists one year ago.

"Public displeasure with Egypt's ruling military council has manifested itself in this campaign against me," El-Mogy said at a post-verdict press conference. "Despite the not-guilty verdict, this case has served to defame me and my family."

In response to the ruling, the Egyptian Women's Alliance (still under formation) called for a protest to be held at the Supreme Administrative Court on 16 March to coincide with Egyptian Women's Day. The alliance, however, denied that the day would be a

celebration, asserting instead that it represented an opportunity to continue the fight against the "mockery" of Egypt's military prosecution system.

After the announcement of the verdict at noon on Sunday, activist Samira Ibrahim, who initially brought the charge against El-Mogy, could be seen crying while surrounded by supporters outside the Military Court Complex in Cairo.

"No one violated my honour – it is Egypt's honour that has been violated; I vow to continue the struggle until the end to reclaim our rights," Ibrahim declared on Twitter (@Samiraibrahim4).

Maha Maamoun of the "No to Military Trials" campaign said that the final verdict had been expected, since "the perpetrator of the crime is at the same time the person investigating it." Maamoun went on to assert that the trial's very premise was faulty, since it had featured a military court investigating charges lodged against its superiors, Egypt's ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).

Human rights lawyer Ragia Omran likewise stated that she had not been surprised by the verdict. She stated that the case's primary goal had not been to indict the army doctor – since he had only been following orders – but to target the "man in charge," in a reference to the military official who had ordered the alleged tests in the first place.

Omran clarified that the ruling did not necessarily contradict a previous one issued by the State Council Administrative Court – which banned the practice of conducting "virginity tests" – since this only applied to future scenarios but not necessarily to Ibrahim's case.

She added that it remained unclear what steps would be taken next, as no official response had yet been made in this regard by Ibrahim's lawyer. The plaintiff's lawyers may, however, appeal the case. This is in addition to the possibility that the second alleged victim to testify, Rasha Abdelrahman, may file a second lawsuit.

"Seeking justice through international channels is also an option," Omran told Ahram Online.

The tests allegedly took place after military personnel broke up a sit-in in Cairo's Tahrir Square on 9 March of last year. A number of female detainees later said they had been tortured and subjected to so-called "virginity tests" the following day.

On 27 December, 2011 the State Council Administrative Court issued a landmark ruling in Ibrahim's favour, outlawing the practice of virginity testing. On the same day, the head of Egypt's military judiciary, Adel El-Morsy, stated that the administrative court's order to suspend the practice was not, in fact, applicable, because such a practice had never been part of the military's prison code.

On 7 February, 2012, two prison wardens summoned to deliver testimony denied that the incident had ever even taken place. The two wardens claimed that the women in question had only been asked by army personnel if they were married and whether or not they were pregnant.
