**A Written Contribution presented to Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities on International Cooperation about Disability**

**(Case study: The Arab Republic of Egypt)**

**Preamble:**

International cooperation for the interest of people with disabilities is a key mechanism offering good opportunities for promoting the rights of the “Differently Abled”. More than one billion people in the world live with some form of disability. In Egypt, according to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, the percentage of persons with disabilities has reached 10.6% from the population census, and the Persons with Disabilities Law No. 10 of 2018 has provided disabled with various rights that qualify, enable and integrate them into society. Among these rights is the need to set 5 % of the workforce for them. These numbers and this law require international cooperation that begins with recognizing international covenants, mechanisms and forums related to the rights of persons with disabilities, and also funds and grants aimed at supporting them.

This written contribution from Elizka Relief Foundation includes some observations on the ways of international cooperation with the Egyptian government to support and promote the rights of people with disabilities.

* **Developments in International Cooperation File: A New Mechanism Adopted by Egypt**

Egypt ratified the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in April 2008,[[1]](#footnote-1) which marked the beginning of potential cooperation regarding the rights of persons with disabilities. And recently, on April 30, 2019, Egypt signed the Valletta Political Declaration on Euro-Arab Cooperation to support the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, during its participation in the high-level Arab-European meeting on the rights of persons with disabilities, held at the headquarters of the Maltese Parliament and attended by the delegations of 22 Arab and European countries. Egypt, thereby, joined the 22 signatory countries, in addition to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the European Commission and the Arab League.[[2]](#footnote-2) This is a good move towards strengthening cooperation and exchanging experiences between the North and the South in this regard.

The declaration stresses the necessity of cooperation in order to consult and involve persons with disabilities in decision-making processes that affect their lives and future, and to encourage continued efforts by Arab governments and the European Union to implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and stress the right of all persons with disabilities. The declaration prioritized education and work issues for persons with disabilities, stressing the grave importance of inclusive education as a major engine for development in our regions and societies, and that it should be made available to everyone, without discrimination, on the basis of equal opportunities, in line with Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and target 4-5 related to the Sustainable Development Goals; and work to ensure the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others, and to earn their livelihood from jobs they choose or accept willingly.

Egypt will also participate in the “European-Arab Forum on Persons with Disabilities/Valetta” which will serve as a platform for exchanging experiences and promoting European-Arab cooperation to support the rights of persons with disabilities at both the bilateral and regional levels, in a way that guarantees them dignity in their societies.

* **Egyptian-British Cooperation: A Move Forward for Persons with Disabilities’ Interest**

The Ministry of Social Solidarity signed on 07 October 2019 a memorandum of understanding with Britain, represented by the British Council in Egypt to support persons with disabilities, train and prepare them for the labor market with a focus on entrepreneurship and creative industries, to integrate them into public life.

The initiative of “Innovations for People with Disabilities” was launched to discover the idea of ​​participatory innovation and find solutions to overcome the obstacles of employing people with disabilities. The winning ideas will receive support and guidance through ideas incubators and financing opportunities or through linking them to new clients or new partnerships, to establish sustainable startups that integrate persons with disabilities, and the Memorandum of Understanding that was signed is valid for three years.[[3]](#footnote-3)

* **Managing Grants for the Disabled: Whose Responsibility?**

The Ministry of Social Solidarity is the agency responsible for overseeing international grants to support people with disabilities, after which comes the role of the National Disability Council, which is a government agency working on promoting and implementing the rights of people with disabilities.

In this regard, it is possible to refer to Ataa Charitable Fund for supporting the people with disabilities that was announced by the Ministry of Social Solidarity, with a capital of one billion pounds. It is the first fund of its kind in Egypt that provides support for people with special needs so that they could purchase prosthetic devices or any other supplies. It provides support in a different way through an investment fund that use investment returns to fund the activity. Ataa is a non-governmental fund, supervised by a board of directors of investment experts in addition to those concerned with issues of persons with disabilities, with the aim of providing permanent funding for offering care and rehabilitation for people with disabilities.[[4]](#footnote-4) Donors can participate in this fund. This is considered a good move by the Egyptian government in order to achieve sustainability in the aids and grants provided to this category.

The same ministry is responsible for civil society organizations working on the same file in the event of receiving foreign funds.

* **SDGs Have Increased International Development Assistance**

When the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 included the 17th goal of international partnership, Egypt has developed a local sustainable development strategy to work to achieve compatibility between the international strategy and what it is doing locally. Therefore, it launched the "Egypt Vision 2030". The status of people with disabilities was a key aspect, as the strategy took into account the role of all groups of society in proportion to their skills, capabilities and needs.

With this in mind, people with special needs were taken into account in the various dimensions of the strategy in a manner that is commensurate with the goal achieved in 2030. For example: The main goals of the education and training axis included "making education available for all without discrimination", and this main goal came out with a sub-goal of "Providing a comprehensive environment supporting the process of integrating people with simple disabilities into pre-university schools and improving the quality of special education schools for learners with severe and multiple disabilities. The sustainable development strategy: Egypt Vision 2030, stressed that the role of people with disabilities in the strategy was studied in coordination with the National Council for Disability Affairs.[[5]](#footnote-5) This allows the possibility of exploiting the governmental orientation towards linking sustainable development with these rights.

Egypt has declared 2018 as the Year of Persons with Disabilities, and the Egyptian government has indeed took many steps that were too many to be mentioned in this written contribution. These steps, however separate, were meant to strengthening international cooperation in the cultural, social, sporting, and artistic rights. One of the key steps is the establishment of the first Arab Forum for the activities of integration schools and special education schools, which activities were launched, by the President of the Republic, in Sharm El Sheikh Conference, with the participation of approximately 110 students with special needs and integration students.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Regarding arts, Cairo University held the ceremony of “Awladna International Forum for Arts of the gifted” 2nd edition, in which delegations from 29 Arab and foreign countries participated, in cooperation with UNICEF and the ministries of tourism, youth, sports, immigration, social solidarity, culture and antiquities.[[7]](#footnote-7)

As for participation in official international events, care had been taken to ensure the participation of people with special needs in government conferences- “youth conferences” at the level of different governorates- and there was a representation for people with special needs in all conferences in which their opinions, on all issues discussed, were expressed.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The Egyptian government allows imports for persons with disabilities to enter Egypt, exempted from customs. Law No. 10 of 2018 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act included articles pertaining to the customs system and customs exemptions, as the executive regulations explicitly stipulated the conditions for exempting equipped cars and devices that could be of great use to people with special capabilities from customs. Which is considered a means of commercial cooperation between Egypt and the European countries exporting it.[[9]](#footnote-9)

**Recommendations**

Elizka Relief Foundation recommends the following:

1. The Egyptian government should enhance dialogue in the international forums in which it recently participated and transfer the Egyptian experience in dealing with this file to the countries participating in such forums.
2. The Egyptian government should use those international platforms in calling for Egyptian bilateral and collective cooperation, such as the aforementioned Egyptian-British Cooperation, to promote the rights of persons with disabilities.
3. The Egyptian government should encourage civil society organizations working on this file, as well as provide them with assistance and remove obstacles that may encounter their own funds.
4. The Egyptian government should organize more events aimed at increasing global, regional and local attention to the rights of persons with disabilities, and calling for international cooperation and exchange of experiences.

1. Reporting status for Egypt, OHCHR, available at: <https://bit.ly/3e20Ojd> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. مصر توقع إعلان "فاليتا" للتعاون الأوروبي العربي لدعم حقوق الأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة"، الأهرام، 30-4-2019، على الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/2XjcbNU> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. التضامن تطلق مبادرة جديدة لدعم ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة"، الهيئة العامة للاستعلامات، 7 أكتوبر 2019، على الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/3e4AdSs> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. عطاء».. دعم مالي بـ«مليار» جنيه لذوي الإعاقة"، أخبار اليوم، 21 ديسمبر 2019، على الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/2JJpsHv> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. موقع ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة باستراتيجية التنمية المستدامة: رؤية مصر 2030"، الاستدامة والتمويل، 19/سبتمبر/2019، على الرابط التالي: <https://bit.ly/39SCddo> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. فاطمة محمد، " 2018.. عام انتصارات ذوي الإعاقة"، المصري اليوم، 24-12-2018، على الرابط التالي: <http://bit.ly/3aPhDfx> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. نجاة الجبالي، " ختام مهرجان أولادنا لفنون ذوي الاحتياجات"، العين الإخبارية، 2018/5/5، على الرابط التالي: <http://bit.ly/38HkiG8> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. محمد صبحي، " كيف انتصرت الدولة لذوى الاحتياجات الخاصة؟"، اليوم السابع، 11 أكتوبر 2019، على الرابط التالي: <http://www.youm7.com/4454142> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. تعرف على شروط تطبيق الإعفاءات الجمركية لسيارات ذوي الإعاقة"، اليوم السابع، 08 يناير 2020، على الرابط التالي: <http://www.youm7.com/4576186> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)