

Statement by H.E. Counselor Omar Marawan
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs
In the Opening Session of
The 64th Session of the African Commission for Human and
Peoples' Rights "ACHPR"

Sharm El-Sheikh, 24 April 2019

Your Excellency, Chairperson of ACHPR,

Excellencies, ACHPR staff,

Honorable Ministers and Delegates of Participating States,

Your Excellency General\ Khaled Foudah, Governor of South Sinai Governate,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me at the outset and on behalf of His Excellency President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi to welcome you to the land of Egypt, where civilizations meet and cultures converge, and to convey to you his best wishes for the success of this session of the ACHPR, for the benefit of the sons of our African continent.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is fortunate that the National Elections Authority announced, yesterday and in the presence of the ACHPR in Egypt, the results of the referendum on the constitutional amendments. 44.4% of eligible voters turned out; and 88.85, the majority of voters, approved the amendments. By virtue of these amendments, Egyptian women are represented in the House of Representatives by no less than 25% of seats. Additionally, other categories, namely persons with disabilities, youth, Christians and Egyptians abroad are guaranteed a minimum level of representation. This indicates the attention given to promoting the human rights of Egyptian people, and represents a new unprecedented addition to this file that ranks high amongst the priorities of the Egyptian Government. In this connection, salutations are due to the Egyptian people, for their civilized practice in this referendum which is an important step towards building the new civil state that Egyptians aspire to.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Egypt's hosting of this important event, in concurrence with its chairmanship of the African Union, unequivocally signifies Egypt's keenness on, and pride in, its African belonging as a main component of the Egyptian identity and culture, and a contributor to this age-old culture.

I would like to express my delight with the hosting of this session in Egypt once again. For it has been thirty long years since Egypt hosted the 4th session of ACHPR. Just as Egypt was one of the first countries to support the then-nascent ACHPR as an embodiment of the African will to solve problems and upgrade human rights and the rights of African peoples, Egypt's keenness on hosting the 64th session is a continuation of its support to ACHPR so that it can bear the formidable burdens assigned to it in an ever-changing world that is abound with conflicting concepts and ones that are outsiders to African cultures. Some try to impose such concepts on our societies, portray them as though they were of universal nature or invoke them to instigate extremism and violence, all with the purpose of keeping our continent cloistered upon itself, preventing it from asserting itself or benefiting from its riches and the hard work of its industrious sons.

I would like to seize this opportunity to invite you to use your stay in Sharm El-Sheikh to familiarize yourselves with South Sinai Governorate, enjoy its fine weather and fascinating nature. Sinai celebrates tomorrow the anniversary of its liberation thanks to the blood of our fallen martyrs. We invite those who will not have the chance to enjoy the land of Turquoise, as we call it, to seriously consider returning to Egypt in a few weeks to witness the most important sports event in the continent: The Africa Cup of Nations, which Egypt is proud to host from 21 June to

19 July 2019. Each and every African is welcome to Egypt.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

African civilizations, with their many age-old off-shoots, ought to be a source of pride for us all. Our continent has been home to many glorious hubs of civilization that have interacted with, and been influenced by, neighboring civilizations and influenced them as well, tangibly contributing to the common human heritage.

Our young continent will continue making contributions at the international level to enhance the international human rights system, based on principles of respecting pluralism and equality among diverse peoples and races. The adoption of modern human rights concepts does not mean parting ways with African traditions and legacy that have been part of the conscience of our societies, it rather necessitates that we strike a balance between modernity and authenticity, while refraining from leaning too much to either side. It also entails that we maintain the components of the African identity, while also renouncing any injurious practices or concepts that hinder the development and advancement of human rights situation in the continent.

We must work together to integrate the outcomes of such meshing between African societies, to create healthy societies that preserve people's dignity, legacy and individual uniqueness, and to create a climate marked by freedom of thought, belief and expression; while opening up the horizons of future and progress.

History has borne witness to the racial abuse and discrimination that Africans and people of African descent have suffered, in addition to the exploitation of their riches and control of their properties under false claims of racial and civilizational superiority. However, the world has succeeded; thanks to the contributions and sacrifices of many sons of Africa and those of the kind people from different continents and races, to end this painful chapter of human history. We must be cautious,

though, and work together to prevent this hateful racism from returning behind a new guise. We must also strictly counter the voices that exploit socio-economic circumstances in some countries to target racial minorities, migrants and refugees; or to fan the flames of fanaticism, hate and violence against them.

Racist discourse has become a trans-boundary threat. Those who spread it try to exploit technological advancement and modern means of communication to build networks to circulate and disseminate their long-abandoned hateful ideas of racial superiority. In the world of today, we should not tolerate any form of racism. Africa should lead the efforts to eradicate this phenomenon.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our continent has made large strides to advance human rights. African Union institutions, including ACHPR, have had a supportive role to consolidate respect to human rights concepts in general, and to continue mobilizing energies and potential to place human rights issues high on our agenda.

Despite the progress made, Africa still faces challenges in this respect, ones that necessitate that we trust our abilities and work together to add to what we already achieved. We must adopt a holistic approach to advance human rights in Africa, an approach that pays equal attention to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, in line with Africa's ambitious 2063 plan.

There is no doubt that Africa should take the initiative to draw attention to importance of adopting a balanced approach to international handling of different rights, in addition to coping with the developments the world is witnessing and how they reflect on the level of enjoyment of internationally recognized rights. Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has recognized everyone's right to enjoy the benefits of scientific advancement and its

applications. It called for states parties to the covenant to observe the measures required for promoting science and culture and to work to advance and spread them; and show the benefits of encouraging and developing international communication and cooperation in the fields of science and culture, which is something that has not yet materialized at the level that is satisfactory to Africa's ambitions. I take this opportunity to officially invite ACHPR on behalf of the Arab Republic of Egypt and based on Article 45 of African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to conduct a comprehensive study on the ways African States and peoples can benefit from scientific and technological advancement in line with Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social And Cultural Rights, and on the associated rights to health, education, decent housing and other human rights and to also monitor the major challenges to those rights and come up with suitable recommendations in that regard.

Our vision, which is based on our ideas, is the corner stone of our fates. The African continent is replete with young minds and wise national visions that can adopt policies that invest its enormous resources to meet peoples' aspirations for wellbeing and decent life with all of its material and moral components. We must exchange experiences and benefit from best national practices to build our capacities and qualify our youth to actively participate in shouldering the responsibility. This is the trend Egypt aims to promote through the regular youth conferences it hosts where it tries to attract the widest African participation possible. Enhancing the role of such dialogue platforms is the means to engage youth in setting the strategies for forward-looking mobility, policymaking and coordination to overcome the common challenges we face.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

African women have made many gains in areas such as education, health and political participation, yet they are still struggling in the areas of

work and employment, in addition to the continuation of some negative stereotypes when dealing with women in a number of societies and the persistence of some harmful cultural and traditional inherited practices such as Female Genital Mutilation and early marriage. Women also still suffer because of poverty and illiteracy, and are negatively affected by economic policies that do not achieve complete gender equality, unavailability of decent health care and underrepresentation in decision making bodies. Women are also hit hardest by deteriorating peace and security situations in many regions, including new forms of untraditional security threats such as terrorism, organized crime and human trafficking, which necessitate intensification of efforts to face these challenges, preserve the achievements made in recent years and continue the path towards more achievements through honest relentless efforts and practical steps.

The Government of Egypt has for long placed human rights issues high on the agenda of national work, these issues include women's rights and empowerment in different fields. For it believes that comprehensive development cannot be achieved without active, positive and effective participation of women; and that women's issues concern the entire society and not just a certain constituent category.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In recent years, Egypt witnessed two great popular revolutions that changed its political landscape. The people were the drivers of these two revolutions. The government tries to heed the call of the people through a constitution that enshrines in its fifth article human rights as mainstay of the political system of the state. The constitution provides that discrimination and hate-mongering are crimes that shall not be time-barred. It compels the state to achieve social justice, affirms that the relation between the individual and the state is based on citizenship and equal opportunities, guarantees the right to peaceful assembly and the right to create political parties and associations and non-governmental

organizations. It also provides for freedom of belief, thought and opinion, in addition of freedom of artistic and literary innovation, press freedom and freedom to publish, amongst other rights and freedoms unprecedented in previous Egyptian constitutions.

Out of an innate conviction with the centrality of human rights as an important component in the comprehensive national development strategy, Egypt is racing with time to achieve the development we aspire to. To this end, we work on many tracks to upgrade the national human rights system with its governmental and non-governmental components by working on institutions as well as people while concurrently developing policies and performance at all levels and providing national mechanisms of self-correction and effective remedies and spreading human rights culture and including it in curricula.

The ultimate goal of these reforms is to build a modern democratic civil state where all Egyptians enjoy all their rights and freedoms and work for the better future they deserve. In this framework, the prime minister issued last November decision No. 2396 to form the Higher Permanent Committee for Human Rights, reflecting an understanding of the importance of having a permanent governmental body that mainly focuses on setting a national strategy for human rights and follows up its implementation, and on building specialized human capacities and ensuring commitment to relevant international pledges. The Egyptian Government is determined to provide all resources to operationalize the role of such Committee and to guarantee the consistency and institutionalization of governmental efforts aimed at uplifting human rights. Egyptian legislators have not neglected the rights of Persons with Disabilities. The House of Representatives approved the law on the National Center for Persons with Disabilities, allowing the Center to practice its powers and work to improve the situation of this dear part of the society. I hereby announce before you that Egypt is soon going to finalize the procedures of acceding to the African Charter for Human and Peoples Rights' Additional Protocol on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Egypt has sought to set the legislative frameworks and draft executive policies to enhance Egyptians' enjoyment of their basic rights to education, health and decent housing. His Excellency the President has launched a campaign to detect anemia, obesity and stunting among school children; and to provide cure to those who need it free of charge. The initiative is targeting 12 million children all over Egypt. Moreover, the "100 Million Healthier Lives" initiative was launched with the aim of detecting Hepatitis C virus and non-communicable diseases. 40 million citizens have been examined so far as part of the initiative. This exceptional service was also made available to foreigners residing in Egypt, including refugees. The aim now is to benefit from this experience and extend the experience to the rest of Africa in the framework of technical cooperation, which includes sending Egyptian doctors to other African countries and providing technical assistance to doctors and nurses in African countries in different areas of examination and diagnosis, and to create databases of the patients.

Egypt has adopted a comprehensive policy that aims at providing a high quality educational and training system that is open for everyone without discrimination, in an effective, fair, sustainable and flexible institutional framework that provides students and trainees with necessary skills and motivates them to innovative thought to contribute to making creative and responsible citizens, ones who are qualified for competitive leadership, aware of their history and culture and accepting of diversity and differences.

On the other hand, many programs for empowering citizens of different social backgrounds and financial capabilities to enjoy the right to decent housing, which includes evacuating the residents of dangerous informal settlements as a top priority, as well as developing other informal settlements and building new smart and eco-friendly cities that follow international standards in infrastructure and quality basic services.

National efforts have also been exerted to provide a package of programs and initiatives for social protection, comprehensive care and economic empowerment of citizens without discrimination, in coordination with the private sector and civil society. The Ministry of

Social Solidarity adopted a strategy that aims at securing a minimum level of income in the form of financial support to needy categories such as poor families, the elderly, persons with disabilities, orphans and the unemployed through the Takaful and Karama "*Solidarity and Dignity*" program that helps nearly 10 million citizens. In addition to workers' insurance, training and qualification of youth, expansion of micro-financing of small enterprises as an effective mechanism to address unemployment and incentivize public and private sectors to support small enterprises and labor-intensive projects.

I would be remiss were I not to mention the great progress Egypt witnessed in the area of guaranteeing and respecting the right to freedom of faith and belief. President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi called for modernization of religious discourse, renunciation of religious extremism and combating calls for hate and violence. The largest cathedral in the Middle East was built side by side with the mosque of New Administrative Capital to reflect the nature of the Egyptian character that has, over its long history, succeeded in renouncing extremist calls and upholding the values of tolerance, pluralism and diversity. Such civilizational heritage is the safety net the has always protected Egypt from falling prey to extremism and destructive thought and unified its people in the face of the threat of terrorism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Talking about Africa has for long decades been associated with images of poverty, suffering, conflicts and wars. Therefore, we must work together to replace this mental image with a positive one that represents hope, peace and development; an image that unleashes the potential of our people. Our peoples deserve the best; and we need labor honestly and stand up together in solidarity and cooperation to implement the Silencing the Guns initiative by 2020, as well as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement and the 2063 development agenda. As all of these are active frameworks for collective continental work. These frameworks will be complemented by devoted efforts to draw the future

image of a prosperous Africa that will be proud of its sons that live on societies that preserve the dignity of Africans and allow them to enjoy their full rights. This optimistic view is not a figment of anyone's imagination; we do have the potential and requisites to make it a reality.

In conclusion, I affirm that Egypt will spare no effort to coordinate with its brethren in the continent to support all initiatives aiming at achieving these noble goals, and to advance the human rights agenda at the continental level, either through Egypt's chairmanship of the African Union or afterwards. Egypt will work with its brethren to enhance experience-sharing and cooperation, with the aim of maximizing of the benefits and integration of efforts for a glorious and prosperous Africa; and to preserve the dignity of African. Indeed, we can.

I welcome you again to Egypt. Thank you for listening.