Context

There is currently a growing global interest in the effective roles that diaspora societies can play towards the sustainable and comprehensive development of their homelands. Since 2011, Egypt has witnessed a significant increase in waves of migration (voluntary and forced), which further intensified post mid-2013 due to the prevailing political violence and deteriorating economic situation. From this perspective, Women for Justice Foundation, in cooperation with HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement, have attached special importance to exploring, networking and activating the Egyptian diaspora networks with the aim of maximizing their roles contributing to the comprehensive development of the motherland, at the heart of which comes support for democratic transformation and civil peace (Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals), which is a necessary precondition for the realization of other goals.

Against this backdrop, “The women for Justice Foundation” and “HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement” jointly organized the first version of the “Egyptian Diaspora Forum” to contribute to highlighting the efforts and successes of the Egyptian diaspora, both individuals and institutions, in advancing the development efforts of the homeland on various levels: politically, economically, socially, and professionally; with a special focus on diaspora women's position as well as routes towards justice and international litigation. Inter alia, the forum aimed to create an opportunity for networking among various components of the Egyptian Diaspora activism scene and to explore opportunities for cooperation and coordination among them.

Objectives

- Celebrating successes of the Egyptian diaspora, communities and individuals.
- Reflecting on the profound challenges of the increasingly difficult and complex landscape of Egyptian diaspora activism.
- Creating an opportunity for introductions and communications between different components of the Egyptian Diaspora and exploring opportunities for cooperation, coordination and networking amongst them.
- Opening channels of communication and bridging the gap between key actors, relevant stakeholders and Diaspora communities at large.
- Creating a space for diaspora activists and human rights defenders to express themselves and communicate with others and propose new and innovative ideas that democratization and human rights organizations are likely to work on.
- Mapping the needs of exiled Egyptian activists and human rights defenders.
- Coming up with recommendations for directing the work of development, democracy and human rights organizations working in Egypt from abroad, as well as for donors and funding agencies to work on capacity building of Egyptian diaspora activists and to deal with them as partners and stakeholders, not just beneficiaries of their respective programs and/or activities.
What Happened?

Held virtually over the course of 5 days, the Egyptian Diaspora Forum convened various democracy-supporting and human rights organizations, donor institutions, human rights defenders, experts, and members of different Egyptian diaspora communities to exchange ideas and best practices on Diaspora's participation in co-design processes, networking, Capacity building and access to justice.

The forum included both open, public sessions that were live broadcasted on the social media pages of both organizations as well as closed, private sessions that required prior registration and/or direct invitations and were limited to activists, human rights defenders, Egyptian, international and regional organizations and various donor agencies.

- **Day 1: In the company of Mohamed Aboul Gheit**

  A memorial service for our late friend and colleague in honor of his impact and legacy one week after his regrettable passing. Through stories of his colleagues, we were immersed by some of his light and intellectual and professional heritage which far exceeded his transient life.

- **Day 2: Egyptian Diaspora and Building Hope**

  This day included two sessions that were moderated by the distinguished journalist and media professional Lillian Daoud, with the participation of six experts from Egypt. In the first session, the speakers touched on hope, pain, personal experiences, and the successes achieved by Egyptian individuals and groups in the diaspora, and how the Egyptian diaspora can rise again to reclaim its activism for the development of Egypt and the enhancement of the human rights situation therein. In the second session, experts from Lebanon, Syria, Libya, Tunisia, Afghanistan, and Iran shared some of the experiences of their countries' diaspora in organizing, mobilizing, and advocating across national borders. They also contributed important insights about what the Egyptian diaspora should consider, care for, and start from.

- **Day 3: Egyptian Diaspora-Challenges and Hopes**

  With the participation of 26 Egyptian, regional and international non-governmental organizations as well as 37 activists and human rights defenders, this day’s sessions were closed and followed Chatham House rules to allow for a safe space for discussion. The first session began with presentations of the relevant activities and programs of the participant organizations, their ways of cooperation and assistance provision, and how the Egyptian diaspora can benefit from and engage with these activities. The second session provided a free and safe space for discussions among activists about the problems and obstacles facing immigrants and diaspora activists. Participants had the opportunity to clarify their visions for the best possible ways to pick up and develop their human rights activism from abroad and what programs they need to enhance their capacities and skills. These discussions were meant to bridge the gap between the challenges and problems of diaspora activists and the modus operandi of the attending organizations that work for the same causes. By the end of the day, the participant organizations came out with a more comprehensive and clearer picture of the Egyptian diaspora situation which will enable them to develop their work.
Day 4: The Intersectional Feminist Diasporic Struggle

Speakers of day 4, all females, discussed the reality of Egyptian women in diaspora, how discrimination is doubled compared to men, and the intersectionality of struggle in their daily lives. They also discussed the opportunities and challenges that stand in the way of building an active feminist movement from abroad and agreed to start coordination with all groups and components of the Egyptian diaspora in order to start working on feminist initiatives to improve the conditions of Egyptian women inside and outside Egypt.

Day 5: Towards a Common Agenda

This day convened representatives of several donors and funding agencies that work on Egypt alongside representatives of Egyptian, Regional and International non-governmental organizations that presented their vision for developing the work and coordination between donors and civil society organizations in order to activate the role of the Egyptian diaspora. Discussions highlighted the importance of the so-called 'Donor Education' which is an ongoing process in which organizations periodically inform donors of issues of importance at each stage, in order to bridge the gap between resources, needs, and donor strategies and policies.
Diaspora Forum in Numbers

- 219 Participants.
- 20 Speakers.
- 14 Regional organizations
- 42 Regional organizations (non-Egyptian)
- 12 International organizations.
- 8 Funding agencies.
- Doctoral and post-doctoral scholars from 10 Universities.
- Women represented %69 of participants.

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1 Egyptian commission for rights and freedoms; EgyptWide; Association of Egyptian Female Lawyers; Committee for justice: الجمعية المصرية للحقوق بالمرأة والطفل محافظة المنوفية; Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression; Speak up; Egyptian Front for Human Rights (EFHR); Gohoud To Support Human Rights Defenders; Humanitarian Journalism Foundation; Law and democracy support foundation (Berlin); The Glocal; The Freedom Initiative; Andalus institute for tolerance and anti-violence studies.

2 Front Line Defenders; Citizen lab, uoft (Canada); Tahrir Institute for Middle East Politics (TIMEP); Human Rights Watch; Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN); IFEX; Article 19; ELCENA JEFFERS FOUNDATION (work internationally to Eradicating World Poverty Programme using international laws, legislations and policies., UK); Association foreign researchers (Spain); Freedom House; Amnesty International; Minority Rights Group.

3 University Of Ulster (UK); City University of New York (CUNY); Institute for Arab Research and Studies; Cairo University; Georgetown University; The University of Manchester; Heidelberg University; London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE); American University in Cairo; Tulane University.
Egyptian Diaspora Forum Recommendations

- **Recommendations for Egyptian, Regional and International organizations**
  - Increase networking and alliances, especially with new and emerging organizations and initiatives, for greater impact.
  - Increase engagement with challenges and issues of the Egyptian diaspora.
  - Develop programs to build the capacities of the Egyptian diaspora and provide them with the necessary knowledge and novel tools, enabling them to restore their activism under the new circumstances.
  - Support coordination among various components of the Egyptian diaspora communities and advance self-organization of different groups and/or initiatives.
  - Highlight the roles of Egyptian diaspora activism in advancing Egypt’s development and pressing for the improvement of the human rights situation.
  - Educate donors about the importance of engaging with the Egyptian diaspora, supporting its self-organization, building its capacities, and supporting new initiatives.
  - Open the door for the engagement of diaspora activists within working organizations, whether in the form of fellowships or training in various fields or administrative levels.
  - Keep working and engaging with transnational advocacy networks.
  - Work with individuals and groups of the Egyptian diaspora as partners, not just beneficiaries.

- **Recommendations for Donors**
  - Increase support for organizations operating in diaspora.
  - Provide support for capacity-building programs aiming at restoring the activism of the Egyptian diaspora.
  - Support new ideas and emerging initiatives and/or organizations.
  - Adopt a capacity-building approach through working to enhance the level of skills and knowledge of Egyptian diaspora activists and civil society organizations, rather than expecting them to have the resources necessary for effective participation.
  - Support feminist initiatives emerging in the diaspora.
  - Focus on prioritizing the new generation of Egyptian civil society leaders in the diaspora.
  - Open up to supporting new and emerging civil society organizations with new and innovative ideas rather than concentrating their support on the same old partners.
  - Support the development of transnational advocacy networks and the self-organization of diaspora groups.
  - Work with civil society organizations as partners, not as beneficiaries.
Speakers at the forum:


**Lilian Daoud:** British-Lebanese Broadcast journalist Based in London.

**Solafa Magdy:** TIMEP Fellow and Egyptian Journalist and Human Rights Defender Based in Paris.

**Nour Khalil:** Egyptian Lawyer and Human Rights Defender, a Researcher specializing in immigration and asylum policies, and Executive Director of the Refugee Platform in Egypt.

**Mostafa Darwish:** Visual Journalist based in Ireland for the Daily Mirror. In 2019 he won the Thomason foundation MOJO award. In 2021 Darwish’s investigation on suicide among the asylum seekers community was selected as the investigation of the year at the Ireland Newsbrands Media awards.

**Abdelrahman Elgendy:** writer and former Egyptian political prisoner who spent six years and three months behind bars. Elgendy is an MFA in Creative Writing candidate at the University of Pittsburgh. As a Dietrich fellow, he is currently working on a memoir about his incarceration experience.

**Wafa Moustafa:** Syrian activist, journalist, and survivor of detention. In her advocacy, Wafa focuses on themes of enforced disappearance, refugees, deportations, and transnational solidarity.

**Sarah Elsheikh Ali:** woman human rights defender from Lebanon with +10 years of experience working in the MENA region. She is a PhD. Candidate and the co-founder and executive director of HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement.

**Arzak Khan:** digital rights expert and South Asia Lead for the I4C network. He has extensive experience in the use of innovative technologies to influence social change, and he has been working to assist Afghan and Iranian human rights defenders in exile to reclaim shrinking civic spaces.

**Houda Mzioudet:** Tunisian researcher on Libyan and Tunisia affairs and is currently studying political science at the University of Toronto. She co-authored a book on the Libyan displacement crisis with Megan Bradley and Ibrahim Fraihat (Georgetown University Press) and recently published a book chapter on transitional justice in Tunisia and black Tunisian activism within an anthology on transitional justice in Tunisia and its different mechanisms edited by Simon Robins and Paul Gready with Routledge.

**Dr Hind Elhinnawy:** A dedicated feminist, activist and academic with an agenda focused on gender activism, intersectionality, social justice & social change. She is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Kent. Her first book explored the ways in which Islamic values are created, reformulated, and fed into the perceptions of young females. Her current projects include the publishing of a monograph with Bloomsbury titled “Secular Muslim Feminism”.

**Mostafa Fouda:** Egyptian lawyer who works as the senior programs director at HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement. He is also a legal researcher at Columbia University-NYC within the project “Global Freedom of Expression”. He is the co-author of the “Advocacy in Exile” Guide, “Justice from Afar” Guide, “MENA Diaspora Engagement: the change mantra” paper, “Partners in Repression” research paper, and many other papers and toolkits.

**Kawthar Elkholy:** Executive Director of Women for Justice and Assistant Professor of Women’s and Gender Studies at Carleton University, Canada.

**May Elshamy:** A journalist and feminist based in the UK, she was behind a number of important social initiatives related to issues of combating sexual harassment, as well as the “Stop Caesarean section” initiative. Shaimaa Elbanna: Feminist activist and media officer at the Committee for Justice Organization.

**Samar Elhusseiny:** Researcher and human rights advocate and program officer at the Egyptian Forum for Human Rights. Previously, she worked as the regional officer for the Alliance of Women Journalists in the Middle East and Turkey and other international and local human rights organizations. Hadeer Mekkawy: Freelance journalist and human rights activist based in Germany.
"HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement” and “Women for Justice” planned this forum to be a stepping stone for further engagement and continued communication with Egyptian diaspora organizations/initiatives as well as donors working on Egypt. Having separate projects on diaspora activism at Women for Justice and HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement, both organizations commit themselves to further coordination towards organizing the Egyptian diaspora forum on a yearly basis to enhance networking and coordination prospects among various components of the diaspora activism community. We also intend to keep promoting the forum’s recommendations to all relevant stakeholders that we engage with in other activities and projects.