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Egypt's New Law Regulating Civil Society

In January 2021, Egypt approved the Executive Regulation for Law no. 149 of 2019, which regulates the activities of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Egypt. The new law is a significant turning point, creating a more favorable environment for civil society work in Egypt. The law was meticulously drafted to ensure its constitutionality and consistency with Egypt's relevant international obligations, particularly the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. It also reflects, in spirit and substance, Egypt's new Constitution (2014), the most progressive in Egypt's history.

The new law was the culmination of several intensive rounds of consultations between representatives of government and 1,300 representatives from Egyptian NGOs, youth, business associations, public figures and foreign NGOs. In this multi-stakeholder consultation process, 40 laws and legal frameworks from different countries worldwide were thoroughly considered, to ensure best practices. This benefits the over 55,000 local and foreign NGOs operating in Egypt – the largest number in any Middle Eastern country.

The Civil Society Law Consultation Process



The new law facilitates the work of local and foreign NGOs operating in Egypt and removes many administrative obstacles. It also ensures greater transparency on basic regulations, activities and funding. Egypt's new law regulating NGOs incorporates encouraging features, including:

- ▶ **Allows the establishment of NGOs by mere notification** and expedites approvals related to licensing; approval automatically granted if no objection is filed within 60 working days;
- ▶ **Reduces the registration fees** necessary to establish local and foreign NGOs and decreases the minimum funding requirements;
- ▶ **Bars the deduction of any approved foreign grants** provided to NGOs;
- ▶ **Promotes digitization** through an inaugural electronic database enhancing communication between the *Ministry of Social Solidarity* and NGOs;
- ▶ **Increases the financial resources allocated to Egypt's NGO's Support Fund** to empower civil society organizations with technical, financial, and administrative capacities, especially those with limited budgets;
- ▶ **Abrogates all penalties of imprisonment**, limiting any violations to financial and administrative fines;
- ▶ **Limits dissolution and suspension of NGOs to judicial rulings;**
- ▶ **Combines all entities engaged in civil society work under one legal umbrella** granting the *Ministry of Social Solidarity* jurisdiction over regulating civil society with limited interference;
- ▶ **Establishes an elected body** for nongovernmental organizations;
- ▶ **Allows the participation of foreign experts** in the boards of NGOs;
- ▶ **Exempts NGOs** from registration approval fees, property taxes, stamp duties, and local use of facilities;
- ▶ **Provides different mechanisms for NGOs to obtain resources**, including charitable funds, local and international grants, foreign financing, incentives, and the launching of initiatives to collect donations.