



Explanatory note on the “Most dangerous megacities for women 2017” ranking By the National Council for Women Egypt

In the past few days, the media carried news on the annual poll conducted by The Thomson Reuters Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the Thomson Reuters news provider. The poll ranks the world’s Megacities on who safe they are for women. The United Nations had designated 31 cities in 19 countries as Megacities, defined as those cities with a population exceeding 10 million people. The poll was conducted only in the largest megacity in each country.

The poll ranked the Egyptian capital, Cairo as “the most dangerous megacity for women in 2017. We categorically and decisively find this ranking **unacceptable and unjustified, from any objective or sensible perspective** that takes into account rational criteria, based on official and documented statistics—whether national and international— and serious studies on the status of women. Such sensible perspectives stand in clear contrast to the approach adopted in the poll where results were based the impressions of a minimum of experts in each country. The poll did not reveal its criteria for selecting those so-called “experts,” except that they are focused on women’s issues and categorized under 5 groups, including academics, non-government organization workers, healthcare staff, policy-makers, and social commentators.

The poll may be classified as "**Perception Poll**" depending on **the perceptions of a group of “experts”** (their number in this poll was between 15 and 20) about four questions in the areas of sexual violence against women (sexual harassment and attacks); (traditional) culture practices that are harmful to women (female genital mutilation; child, early or forced marriages and female infanticide); access to health services (control over reproductive health and maternal mortality); and economic opportunities (access to resources, ownership of assets and access to financial and banking services).

The stated goal of the poll is to inform and guide policies governing the urban environment and infrastructure to ensure the benefits of city living are equal shared, a goal that is apparently important, indeed. However, we must underscore here **that policies of respectable states should not be based on off-had views, perceptions and impressions of a small handful of "experts", but rather on documented information and knowledge bases**. It is also important to point out that in each of the four areas covered by the poll, there is a wealth of internationally agreed indicators, backed by documented statistics produced by national statistical bureaus and by various relevant United Nations organizations, alongside a large number of solid studies adopting research methods that are generally accepted in relevant academic circles. An honest review of such a knowledge base could demonstrated to those conducting the said poll how far away from reality were the few impressions upon which they based their judgment, including their scoring and ranking.

The National Council for Women emphasizes that it is fully consciousness of the challenges that face Egyptian women, some of which include the four areas covered in the said poll, and that it is addressing those challenges through serious work based upon documented indicators, statistics and studies, and not only perception polls. The Councils’ approach, and for that matter, the approach of the Egyptian state to addressing women’s issues through deliberate action and sound planning is clearly laid out in **The National Strategy for the Empowerment of Women in Egypt 2030**, which was formulated and adopted by the President of the Republic earlier this year, that is before the poll in question. In this regard, we must record with appreciation the great attention and priority that the Egyptian State accords to women's issues and the pursuit of gender equality. We must and acknowledge that positive developments have been achieved on women’s empowerment and gender equality, at the legislative and executive levels, and also at the level of social and ideational transformation.



In this explanatory note, the Council is keen not to be driven by passionate or ardent anger –albeit justified—over the unjust and unwarranted (by fact) labelling of our great city of Cairo as most dangerous megacity for women in 2017. Accordingly, we will focus our comments on methodological remarks that question whether the said poll provides an accurate reading of reality that should be considered.

We present some preliminary comments here below:

- The methodology of the poll is based on measuring perceptions of respondents. Measuring perception requires an adequate sample whether in terms of size or design. Selecting a purposive sample that include a few individuals (15-20) from each city is not a proper methodology that can be used to rank cities.
- The ranking is reported without mentioning the value or score assigned to each city. With such a minute sample size as in this poll, the sampling error (assuming that this is a probabilistic sample) is expected to be large and the differences between the scores assigned to different cities may actually be smaller than the sampling error, which render the ranking unjustified. A potentially better approach would have been to group the cities in categories (for example below 25%, from 25% to less than 50%, 50% to less than 75%, and 75% and above) since the metrics currently used are not accurate enough to differentiate between cities. This is potentially obvious from reviewing the graphs provided in the poll, which show a small difference between consecutive cities.
- The process of publishing the poll is not transparent enough. The readers have no access to the actual summary results (scores) or the raw data file despite the fact that more than 10 weeks have elapsed between data collection (28 July 2017) and publishing of the results (17 October 2017). The link to request the full poll data on the website does not work. We have tried it repeatedly.
- Results of the poll give impressions that are contradictory to well-established facts. For example, the ranking of "Access to Healthcare" that reflects whether women have good access to healthcare services, including control over reproductive health and maternal mortality is surprising as it contradicts indicators such as maternal mortality ratio, percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel and percent of women with unmet needs of contraceptives. These three indicators are published by UN Agencies such as The United Nations Fund for Population (UNFPA) and The World Health Organization (WHO) and are becoming an integral part of the global governance system of development adopted by international organizations to measure the achievements of countries in the implementation of the 2030 agenda for development.
- The previous point can be explained by comparing the three indicators in the 19 countries. For example, Cairo is worse than Delhi in woman access to health care even though maternal mortality ratio (MMR) in India is more than 5 times its level in Egypt, percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel (BASHP) in India is 52% vs. 92% in Egypt and percent of women with unmet needs of contraceptives (UNC) in India is 28% vs. 20% in Egypt. More surprising are the comparisons between Cairo and Lagos. The latter came in rank 8 much better than Cairo (rank 3), despite the fact that the three indicators are much worse in Nigeria, with MMR in Nigeria as high as 814 vs 33 (28 times), BASHP in Nigeria 38% vs. 92% in Egypt and UNC in Nigeria 72% vs. 20% in Egypt. The same argument applies when comparing Egypt to Bangladesh or Indonesia.
- Similar arguments apply to the three other blocks covered in the poll, especially with education which is a main component of economic opportunities. High female accessibility to education in Egypt (especially in Cairo) with more females (than males) in university education has been persistently observed and this was reflected in several international reports. For example, the Global Gender Gap report indicates that the gender gap in education in Egypt is smaller than many other developing



countries. However, the survey shows that Cairo is much lower than other megacities in those developing countries.

- It is worth mentioning that the data on the three indicators mentioned above are calculated on the national level not on the city level, however, with very few exceptions city level indicators are usually higher than the national level, since the urban centres are more developed than rural areas and megacities are more developed than other smaller urban centres.
- The National Council for Women in Partnership with the CAPMAS and the UNFPA conducted an Economic Costing of Violence against Women in 2015 and announced in 2016. The National Representative Sample Survey highlighted that 6.6 % of Women face sexual harassment in public transportation, 9.6 % in the public space, 1.3 % face sexual harassment in the educational institutions, and 3.7% in their work.
- And in reference to early marriage the lately announced Egyptian Census 2017 presented 2% for early marriage in comparison to total marriage and number of cases around 111,040 cases of marriage below the age of 18.

Additionally, we wish to highlight that:

Egypt has adopted harsher punishments for sexual harassment and rape in relevant laws.

- Article 306(bis)(a) of the Egyptian Penal Code provides that individuals who carry out sexual or obscene gestures in any manner, including by modern means of communication, will be punished with a term of imprisonment of not less than six months or a fine of EGP3,000. Article 306(bis)(a) states that if the act of sexual harassment is repeated by the same individual, the punishment of imprisonment will be increased to one year and the fine to EGP5,000-10,000
- Article 306(bis)(b) states that if the harassment is done with the intent of receiving sexual gratification from the victim, the punishment will be a term of imprisonment of not less than one year and a fine of EGP10,000-20,000. Moreover, any individual who uses duress to receive sexual gratification will be punished with a term of imprisonment of between two and five years and a fine of EGP20,000-50,000

Egypt has also adopted harsher punishment for FGM.

- On August 31, 2016, the Egyptian People's Assembly approved the amendment of article 242 (bis) of the Penal Code. Article 242 (bis) criminalizes the act of female genital mutilation (FGM) by removing any of the external genitalia, partially or completely or inflicting injuries to them without medical justification. Previously, article 242 (bis) covered FGM as a misdemeanour and imposed the penalty of imprisonment for between three months and two years on practitioners who commit the offense. Under the new amendment —subject to the provisions of Article 61 of the Penal Code and without prejudice to any more severe penalty stipulated by another law— individuals committing this crime will be punished with a term of imprisonment between five and seven years. The article also punishes, with a penalty of imprisonment for between one and three years, any individuals who escort the victims of such crimes to the perpetrators. Furthermore, the amendment punishes the crime with up to 15 years' imprisonment if the act of FGM leads to the death of the victim or a "permanent deformity.

The National Council for Women suggests the following:

- If the "quasi-survey" is repeated in the future, a larger number of experts should be interviewed. Alternatively, a proper survey with an adequate sample size from each country should be considered.
- When disseminating the results, transparency should be adopted. Guidelines of the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) and the World Association of Public Opinion Research (WAPOR) should be considered. This includes reporting the scores (not only the ranks), reporting on the profile of interviewees, limitations of the study, and how representative are the results.



- Segmenting the sample in each country to make sure that a more diversified group of experts, knowledgeable enough in the four areas, are included in the survey.