



PEACE & HUMANITARIAN #Women's rights NEWS
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Egyptian feminist on Human Rights Council: 'the international community isn't listening'

By [Liv Martin](#)



Speaking to the Human Rights Council on Friday, Egyptian feminist activist Mozn Hassan called on international actors to invest in women activists.

Even though Hassan was given only one minute and 30 seconds for her oral statement, she was determined to make this moment on the international stage count. Hassan spoke before the Council along with other civil society members, following the presentation of a report by the UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls.

She has focused her life on standing up against sexual violence in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and is co-founder of the organisation [Nazra for Feminist Studies](#), which documents sexual violence and advocates for survivors. In 2016, Hassan and Nazra were recognised for their contributions to the movement with a [Right Livelihood](#) award.

Lately, in the MENA region where Hassan works, factors like the Covid-19 pandemic and multiple conflicts have contributed to a bleak situation for many women, she said. A 2021 [Amnesty International report](#) on the region highlighted “honour” killings in Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait and Palestine, crack downs on reproductive rights in Iran, the disappearance of women and girls in Yemen, and discrimination in Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt.

In her presentation, the chair of the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women expressed worry about Afghanistan, noting there is increasingly an “erasure of women from public life”.

Getting attention from the international community to address human rights violations in the MENA region is a continuous struggle, according to Hassan. “The international community are not seeing not only the realities, but they are not listening to the narratives of those survivors and the groups and the families who are struggling,” she said.

Another difficulty is fighting against foreign stereotypes. Hassan is weary of the ways her region is sometimes framed — that feminist activists there are westernized and not grounded in the region and that it is made of conservative societies where women are “happy to be oppressed or battered”. Those characterisations, she said, are far from the truth.

“It is important for the international community to understand that we, in this region, are not the stereotypes. There are many things happening for our existence [and] our rights, in this region – more than they would like to think.”

The lack of recognition is especially problematic given the level of danger activists experience to do their work. Across the region, governments have consistently cracked down on human rights defenders.

In Hassan's line of work, she said, the price can be femicide. Even within her own personal life, she has lost friends and family, and normal life experiences like finding a partner mean bringing another person into the fray.

A history of activism

But Hassan sees the importance of her work every day, and recognises she is part of a long line of movements in the region. Hassan is following in the footsteps of feminist activists like Doria Shafik, active in the 1940s. Now, she is mentoring a new generation of feminists.

Her latest endeavour is the [Doria Feminist Fund](#), named after Shafik, and financially supported by the fruits of her Right Livelihood award. Its focus is on providing resources to emerging feminist groups in the MENA region through grants and project funding. It's Hassan's way of “giving back to the movement”.

But Doria can't fund every project. At the Council meeting, Hassan called on member states, financial institutions and private donors to direct resources to “grass-roots organisations and movements led by young women activists, while respecting their organisational autonomy”.

There are inspiring movements taking place throughout the region, said Hassan, which have not received enough international recognition. Women are fighting for the [peace process in Yemen](#). In Lebanon, a new generation is leading a [gender justice agenda](#). And Sudan's feminist movement is [slowly being reconstructed](#) after years under a militant Islamic regime.

“International solidarity is so important. These movements can't deal with it alone,” she said. “They need resources and political pressure to put their issues on the table.”

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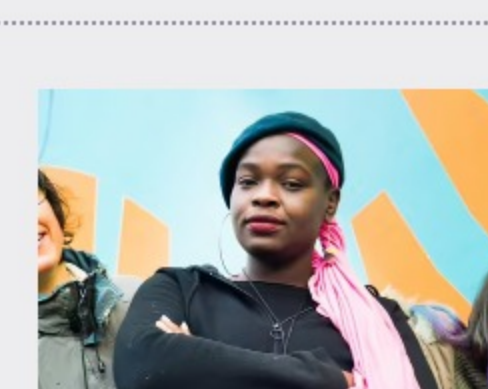
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