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"Violence against women: Good practices in  
combating and eliminating violence against women"

Expert Group Meeting

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## **HONOUR KILLING IN EGYPT**

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

The Association of Legal Aid for Women (CEWLA) is situated in Beaulac el Dakrou, a densely populated low income area in Cairo, Egypt. A large number of the inhabitants of the area came originally from conservative rural Upper Egypt to look for jobs and to settle down in Cairo. CEWLA is always visited by girls and women who come to seek CEWLA's assistance in issuing identity cards or obtaining birth certificates, seeking free of charge legal aid, or seeking counseling with regard to female genital mutilation.

During their visits to the NGO, women and girls recalled several incidences of honour killing that took place in the rural areas they came from. They also mentioned that the same incidences happen sometimes to their relatives or friends in the urban area where they live.

CEWLA became interested in addressing this difficult problem in Egypt and which was never addressed before either by government or by NGOs. It was in fact a taboo. The struggle against honour crimes started by CEWLA ddrwiteca



with the result that FGM is universally practiced and veiling is increasingly imposed and honour crimes are acceptably practiced.

Honour crimes refer to the murder of a woman by her male family members for a perceived violation of the social norms of sexuality, or a suspicion of women having transgressed the limits of social behaviour imposed by traditions. This includes seeing or meeting a man even if this is only a suspicion or a gossip. Honor crimes include also a husband kills his wife whom he or other family members suspected her of adultery. It is difficult to estimate the overall number of honour killings that take place yearly in Egypt. An Egyptian report based on 1995 statistics counted 52 honor killings (out of 819 murders) reported.

Neither Shariah nor modern laws have appropriately penalized the practice due to the strong influence of the tribal system and popular beliefs about women's sexuality. In addition, modern penal codes and also the practices reinforce the notion that men have a "right" to punish women for improper sexual behaviour.

Honor crimes constitute a major violation of women's human rights. It is the most extreme form of domestic violence. Murder to cleanse family honor is a type of crimes committed against women, with impunity, in many parts of the world.

Egyptian films represent honour killing as part of highly valued and well respected tradition. Family honour is shown as dependent on the sexual conformity of its female family members. With the strong wave of conservatism in Egypt, strong criticism of the practice of honour killing by activists is rejected by many. They consider activists who condemn the practice as deviants from the religious principles and from good traditions and that they are only attempting to adopt a western agenda that does not respect family's honour and that permit females to practice premarital and extra marital relationships.

Article 17 of the Egyptian Penal code allows judges to decrease the sentences given in the case of murder when they decide that the condition of the murderer requires so. Such reductions reach as little as six months that could also be spent during the trial. Therefore the murderer can escape being imprisoned and walks free.

Also in the same penal code, a man's act of adultery is adulterous only in the marital home (article 277), but a wife is adulterous outside, or inside the marital home, and need not be found deflagrate delicate for the husband to benefit from the defense of inflamed emotions. The constitutionality of these laws has been challenged by activists in Egypt.

## **CEWLA'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST HONOUR CRIME**

CEWLA adopted several strategies in its campaign against honor killing. These strategies consisted of searching for, and analyzing information on honour killing, obtaining information on court cases concerned with honour crimes and analyzing the court rulings and sentences given to murderers, discussing with legislators, policy makers and the media the issue of honour crime, raising awareness of the public about



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In all ten court cases the penalties ranged from no verdict to imprisonment between 2 and 4 years except the first





