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Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, Pedro Arrojo Agudo, on his visit to Egypt

Comments by the State*

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

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1. The Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt values its constructive engagement with the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation and reaffirms its longstanding commitment to cooperation with the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, in accordance with the principles of objectivity, impartiality, constructive dialogue, and mutual respect.

2. The Government of Egypt welcomes the visit of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation to Egypt, and expresses its appreciation to the Special Rapporteur for the constructive engagement maintained throughout his visit, as well as the insights and recommendations he shared with the Government. While the report contains observations and recommendations that reflect the Special Rapporteur's assessment of the remaining challenges, the Government notes that the report also acknowledges a number of significant national achievements, including the cooperation extended during the visit, the progress made in expanding access to water and sanitation services, and the impact of the "Hayah Kareema" Presidential Initiative in advancing equitable access to these essential services. In this regard, the Government considers the report to provide a useful basis for continued dialogue and technical cooperation aimed at further strengthening the realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation in Egypt.

3. The Government considers that a number of the recommendations contained in the report provide a useful opportunity to further strengthen ongoing national efforts that are already reflected, to varying degrees, in existing national strategies, policies and institutional reforms. For instance, Egypt remains committed to further enhancing meaningful participation of local communities and municipalities to progressively strengthen the role and capacities of local authorities in water and sanitation management, while ensuring effective coordination among the competent national institutions. The Government also recognizes the importance of continuing efforts to develop and enforce legislative and regulatory frameworks and monitoring mechanisms to prevent pollution and safeguard water resources. Egypt further reaffirms its commitment to continue its ongoing efforts to ensure sustainable access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation, particularly for persons in vulnerable situations, as part of its broader sustainable development and human rights agenda.

4. We welcome the attention accorded to the realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation and appreciates the opportunity to provide additional information and clarification regarding a number of observations contained in the report.

5. Egypt continues to face exceptional structural water challenges. As one of the world's most water-scarce countries, Egypt relies almost entirely on its existing water uses from the Nile waters, while simultaneously addressing rapid population growth, increasing development needs and the growing impacts of climate change. Accordingly, national water governance is based on an integrated water resources management approach that combines demand management, diversification of water sources, water reuse, desalination, infrastructure modernization and enhanced efficiency in water use.

6. With respect to references to Egypt’s water deficit, the Government of Egypt reiterates that water scarcity is a scientifically established reality. Egypt’s renewable water resources—primarily its existing water uses of 55.5 billion cubic meters from the Nile River—have remained unchanged for decades, while the country’s actual water requirements amount to approximately 110 billion cubic meters annually. This gap, estimated at approximately 55 billion cubic meters, is addressed through large-scale water reuse and recycling projects implemented via major wastewater treatment plants (approximately 21 billion cubic meters annually), as well as through the importation of “virtual water” embodied in food commodities and agricultural products (approximately 34 billion cubic meters annually).

In view of the above, the Government wishes to offer the following comments concerning specific observations contained in the report.

Paragraph 10

7. The realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation remains a national priority in Egypt. Article 79 of the Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation. Contrary to what is stated in the report, Egypt is committed to ensuring these rights without discrimination for all persons within its territory, including persons living in remote areas, refugees, and migrants, in line with Egypt Vision 2030 and Sustainable Development Goal 6.

8. To realize these rights, Egypt has implemented several major national projects, including the Hayah Karima (Decent Life) Initiative to expand drinking water and sanitation services in rural villages, the construction of desalination plants in remote and coastal areas, and the establishment of tertiary wastewater treatment plants, such as the Bahr El-Baqar Wastewater Treatment Plant and the Al Mahsama Water Treatment Plant, to increase water reuse and enhance water security. In addition, Egypt applies a subsidized tariff structure for drinking water services to ensure affordability, particularly for low-income households, while expanding service coverage to underserved communities.

Paragraph 16-19

9. With regard to paragraph 16 concerning the institutional framewowk, the Government of Egypt wishes to clarify that each ministry has clearly defined mandates and areas of competence, which do not impede the effective functioning of the sector. Rather, these mandates are integrated and coordinated in accordance with the relevant laws and regulatory frameworks governing this area.

10. The Government of Egypt also wishes to highlight the establishment of the National Water Council, which is responsible for coordinating among stakeholders in the sector at both the central level, including the relevant ministries and authorities, and the local level across the different governorates.

11. The establishment of the Council represents a significant institutional advancement in the governance of the water sector, as it contributes to a more integrated allocation of responsibilities among the relevant entities, thereby strengthening high-level coordination, promoting a unified strategic vision, and supporting participatory decision-making to ensure the sustainable and effective management of water resources.

12. With regard to paragraph 19, Egypt wishes to clarify that, in recent years, specialized departments and units have been established within a number of institutions responsible for the water sector to assess the impacts of climate change on water resources and water supply and sanitation infrastructure, and to develop appropriate response measures, including both adaptation and mitigation actions, within the scope of each institution’s mandate and responsibilities.

13. These specialized units also work to integrate climate change considerations into planning and operational processes, thereby enhancing the sector’s resilience to future challenges and contributing to the sustainability of the services provided to the population.

Paragraph 21

14. The report mentions that Egypt’s institutional framework for water management indicates that the sector remains characterized by fragmented governance and longstanding emphasis on irrigation. We would like to note that

15. With regard to paragraph 21, The Government of Egypt emphasizes that effective institutional coordination mechanisms already exist at the local level through the governorate coordination committees, which bring together representatives of the governorates, affiliated water and sanitation companies, and the relevant executive authorities. These committees provide a structured platform for discussing annual investment plans, identifying priority needs, and following up on citizens' complaints.

16. In addition, governorates play a central role in supporting decision-making through continuous coordination with the affiliated companies concerning the identification of service expansion areas, service improvement plans, and urgent interventions. This reflects a

model of participatory governance at the local level, rather than an exclusively centralized approach to service management.

17. Moreover, publicly available information on the official websites and social media platforms of governorates and local authorities clearly demonstrates the close coordination between the chairpersons of the affiliated companies and the respective Governors during the inauguration of drinking water and sanitation projects, consultative meetings, and public hearings addressing citizens' concerns regarding water supply and sanitation services.

18. In the same context, reports issued by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), together with the performance reports of the Holding Company for Water and Wastewater, demonstrate significant improvements in service coverage, service quality, and operational efficiency following the 2004 restructuring, reflecting the positive impact of the institutional reform process.

Paragraph 22

19. Egypt emphasizes that the role of private companies engaged under either traditional Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contracts or various forms of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) arrangements is strictly limited to the design, construction, operation, or maintenance of drinking water and sanitation facilities. Such contractual arrangements do not, in any way, affect tariff-setting or billing practices, which remain subject to the tariff decisions issued by the competent public authorities. Nor do they affect the provision of drinking water services to the most vulnerable groups.

20. Accordingly, these partnership arrangements do not constitute privatization of drinking water and sanitation services. Rather, they are intended to leverage the technical expertise, implementation capacity, and financing capabilities of the private sector within a regulated partnership framework. The difference between the actual cost of service provision and the approved consumer tariff is covered through allocations from the State's general budget in accordance with the applicable tariff decisions.

Paragraph 23

21. With regard to paragraph 23, concerning Nubian communities affected by the construction of the High Dam, the Government recalls that the Aswan High Dam remains one of Egypt's most significant national development projects, providing long-term benefits through flood protection, drought mitigation, hydropower generation and enhanced regulation of the Nile River.

22. The Government further notes that measures were undertaken to address the social consequences associated with the establishment of the reservoir, including organized resettlement programs, the establishment of new Nubian villages in the Kom Ombo area, provision of housing, allocation of agricultural land, financial compensation for affected properties and livelihoods, and the construction of schools, healthcare facilities and other essential public services. Development initiatives in Nubian areas continue to form part of the Government's broader commitment to inclusive regional development.

Paragraphs 29 and 30

23. With regard to paragraphs 29 and 30 concerning Egypt's water resources and water use, the Government reiterates that national water resources management is based upon a diversified portfolio of conventional and non-conventional water resources, including Nile water, groundwater, desalinated seawater and treated wastewater reuse.

24. Over recent years, Egypt has significantly expanded desalination capacity and invested extensively in advanced wastewater treatment and reuse facilities as integral components of its National Water Strategy. Non-conventional water resources have consequently become an increasingly important pillar of the country's water security policy.

25. The Government further notes that Egypt's water deficit represents a structural challenge arising from the disparity between limited renewable water resources and growing demographic and development demands. Accordingly, national policy focuses on maximizing the efficiency of available resources through integrated water resources

management, expanded wastewater reuse, seawater desalination, modernization of irrigation systems and optimized water allocation.

26. In addition, Egypt continues to address part of its water deficit through the concept of virtual water embodied in agricultural trade, thereby contributing to enhanced national food security while promoting the sustainable management of domestic water resources.

Paragraph 33

27. The Government also considers it important to underline that the realization of the human right to water cannot be viewed apart from the realization of the right to food. National water policy therefore seeks to balance domestic consumption, agricultural production and economic development in a manner that simultaneously safeguards access to drinking water while preserving national food security, particularly in light of increasing regional and global challenges affecting agricultural markets and food supply chains.

28. The report claims that water scarcity cannot be invoked as a justification for failing to ensure everyone's access to safe drinking water and sanitation. The Government notes in this regard that invoking water scarcity is not done to justify particular actions, but rather is a reflection of an objective reality resulting from rapid population growth coinciding with finite water resources. Major national development projects constitute a necessary response to securing the country's future. It is well acknowledged in paragraph 7 of the report that the majority of the population resides on only 5 per cent of the national territory. Accordingly, the reference in the report to a 2 % allocation is not supported by facts. Potable water, domestic use and industrial consumption currently account for approximately 17–18 billion cubic meters annually, representing around 20–22 per cent of Egypt's available water resources, rather than 2 per cent as stated in the report. In practice, Egypt's water allocation policy gives absolute priority to drinking water supplies, and no amount of drinking water is diverted to agricultural use.

29. The Government of Egypt further stresses the interdependence between the human right to safe drinking water, water security and food security, emphasizing that these elements should be addressed as mutually reinforcing rather than competing objectives. In this regard, the Government sees that delineating a strict distinction between drinking water and agricultural water is largely theoretical and does not reflect practical realities. Reliance on importing all food commodities as a consequence of ceasing agricultural production would pose a direct threat to national food security, particularly in the context of ongoing geopolitical crises.

Paragraphs 35 - 39

30. With regard to paragraphs 35 and 39 concerning access to drinking water and sanitation services, the Government wishes to underscore the substantial progress achieved in expanding service coverage across the country over the past decade through sustained public investment in water infrastructure.

31. According to official administrative data, access to improved drinking water services has reached approximately 99 per cent nationwide. Sanitation coverage has likewise expanded significantly, reaching approximately 70 per cent at the national level, including approximately 96 per cent in urban areas and around 60 per cent in rural areas. These achievements reflect the Government's sustained commitment to progressively realizing the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation through targeted investment programmes and infrastructure expansion.

32. The Government also wishes to emphasize that drinking water supplied through the public network is subject to comprehensive quality assurance procedures in accordance with national drinking water standards. Water quality is continuously monitored through an integrated system of accredited laboratories conducting regular sampling and testing throughout the production and distribution process, thereby ensuring compliance with applicable public health requirements.

Paragraphs 41 to 44

33. With regards to paragraph 41, the report states that while the special rapporteur appreciates the government's intention to provide irrigation water without charge, in support of small scale farmers, he notes notes however that the absence of clarification incentives for improving irrigation practices is particularly difficult to justify in the current context of water scarcity. We would like to note in this regard that water in Egypt is not considered as a commodity. Moreover, it is important to take into account the social context in which more than 50 percent of the population rely on agriculture for their food security and their economic wellbeing. A small increase in tariffs could therefore lead to a more than proportional increase in food insecurity and greatly affect the economic livelihood of people that are already economically underprivileged, thereby directly affecting their human rights.

34. With regard to paragraphs 42 and 44 concerning socio-economic disparities and access to water and sanitation services, the Government recognizes that expanding equitable access to basic services remains a central objective of national development policy.

35. Despite the structural challenges arising from water scarcity, Egypt has succeeded in achieving near-universal access to drinking water services while continuing to expand sanitation coverage across underserved communities. Notwithstanding the challenges associated with water scarcity, drinking water service coverage has reached approximately 99 per cent, while sanitation service coverage has reached approximately 70 per cent nationwide.

36. This approach has resulted in substantial improvements across numerous governorates, including rural areas that historically experienced lower service coverage. Large-scale infrastructure programs continue to be implemented to further reduce regional disparities and strengthen equal access to essential public services.

Paragraph 55

37. With regard to paragraph 55 concerning water allocation for new urban communities, the Government wishes to clarify that Egypt's urban expansion policy forms part of a long-term national strategy aimed at redistributing population, relieving demographic pressure on the Nile Valley and Delta, and supporting sustainable economic development.

38. Water infrastructure serving new urban communities is planned within the framework of the national water resources strategy and reflects current and projected demographic and development needs. Investment in these communities does not diminish access to water services in existing cities or rural areas. On the contrary, the Government has continued to allocate unprecedented levels of public investment to improving drinking water and sanitation services throughout the country, particularly in rural governorates under the *Hayah Karima* programme.

39. Official data indicates that the new urban communities administered by the New Urban Communities Authority account for approximately 11.5 per cent of total drinking water production nationwide. The Government further notes that the report relies on outdated data dating back more than 13 years and does not reflect the significant progress achieved in expanding drinking water and sanitation services through major national investments and projects.

Paragraph 63

40. With regard to paragraph 63 concerning women's participation in water governance, the Government reiterates its commitment to the principles of equality, equal opportunity and non-discrimination.

41. Recruitment, promotion and appointment within the water sector are based exclusively on professional qualifications, competence and experience. Women participate actively across technical, scientific, administrative and leadership positions within the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation and other relevant institutions.

42. Women currently represent approximately 40 per cent of the engineering workforce within the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation, while a number of senior leadership

positions are held by women. These figures reflect the Government's continued efforts to promote women's participation and leadership in the management of water resources.

Paragraph 72

43. With regard to paragraph 72 concerning sedimentation in Lake Nasser, the Government notes that sediment dynamics within the reservoir are subject to continuous scientific monitoring by the competent national research institutions and technical authorities.

44. Sediment accumulation in Lake Nasser has reduced the dead storage capacity rather than the total storage capacity. The total storage capacity remains 162 billion cubic meters at an elevation of 182 meters, while the dead storage capacity is estimated at 31 billion cubic meters at an elevation of 147 meters

Paragraphs 87 to 93

45. With regard to the references to the diversion of water for desert reclamation projects (including Toshka and others) and the criticism concerning the water intensity of such large-scale projects, it should be noted that the Government's 2025/2026 Plan explicitly identifies the expansion of land reclamation in Toshka, North Sinai and the New Delta as a strategic priority for strengthening national food security. Furthermore, large-scale development projects, including Toshka and the New Delta, together with planned resettlement initiatives aimed at expanding beyond the narrow Nile Valley, constitute necessary geographical and economic solutions to accommodate rapid population growth and reduce demographic pressure on the Nile Valley and Delta, where approximately 100 million people reside on no more than 6 per cent of Egypt's territory.

46. The Government further notes that this strategy relies primarily on the use of non-conventional water resources, particularly tertiary-treated agricultural drainage water supplied through the New Delta Wastewater Treatment Plant, the largest wastewater treatment facility of its kind in the world, as well as the Bahr El-Baqar Wastewater Treatment Plant. Accordingly, these projects are not dependent on existing allocations of potable water but rather on the generation and utilization of additional non-conventional water resources. In the case of Toshka, irrigation is based on the planned utilization of Egypt's share of Nile floodwaters, together with carefully managed groundwater resources, with the objective of cultivating strategic crops, including wheat, thereby reducing dependence on imports and strengthening national food security.

Paragraph 95

47. Regarding paragraph 95, Egypt shares the views of the Special rapporteur that only through cooperation at the Nile basin level, in accordance with conventional and customary international law, including principles reflected in the relevant U.N. Conventions, could reduce regional tensions and achieve benefits for all.

Paragraph 112

48. With regard to paragraph 112 concerning labour rights within the drinking water and sanitation sector, the Government reaffirms its commitment to protecting workers' rights through a comprehensive legislative and institutional framework consistent with national labour legislation. Employees in the sector benefit from legally established mechanisms governing wages, incentives, occupational safety, grievance procedures and dispute resolution. Social dialogue constitutes an essential component of labour relations, with institutional mechanisms facilitating constructive engagement between workers, employers and the Government.

49. In this regard, the National Council for Wages plays an important role in reviewing minimum wage policies and broader social protection measures through a tripartite framework involving representatives of government, employers and workers.

50. Furthermore, the recently enacted Labour Law (Law No. 14 of 2025), which entered into force on 1 September 2025 following extensive societal dialogue, consultations with

relevant stakeholders and engagement with the International Labour Organization (ILO), provides a comprehensive legal framework for the protection of workers' rights, including provisions regulating the right to strike and the establishment of labour courts for the settlement of labour disputes.

Paragraph 115 (b)

51. With regard to recommendation 115(b) concerning industrial wastewater and environmental pollution, the Government wishes to refer to article 44 of the constitution stating that the State shall protect the River Nile, preserve Egypt's historical rights thereto, rationalize and maximize its use, and refrain from wasting or polluting its water. In this regard, the Government emphasize that Egypt has established a comprehensive legislative and regulatory framework governing environmental protection, pollution control and industrial wastewater management.

52. Egypt hosts numerous major industrial cities equipped with independent and specialized wastewater treatment facilities. Notable examples include the industrial wastewater treatment plant in Robbiki Leather City and the Bayad Al Arab wastewater treatment plant in Beni Suef Governorate.

53. Environmental compliance is ensured through inspection, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms implemented by the competent authorities in accordance with applicable environmental legislation. In addition, Egypt has invested in dedicated industrial wastewater treatment facilities serving major industrial zones, thereby strengthening pollution prevention and protecting water resources from industrial discharges.

54. These measures form part of a broader national strategy aimed at enhancing environmental sustainability, promoting responsible industrial development and ensuring the protection of public health and natural resources.

In conclusion, the Government of Egypt reaffirms that the provision and regulation of drinking water and sanitation services are supported by a comprehensive constitutional, legislative and institutional framework that promotes transparency, accountability, consumer protection and equitable access to public services. Through effective mechanisms for receiving complaints, monitoring service quality and continuously improving service delivery, together with sustained investments in network rehabilitation, leakage reduction, smart metering and digital modernization, the Government remains committed to enhancing the efficiency, sustainability and resilience of the water sector.

Egypt will continue to pursue an integrated and sustainable approach to water governance that is consistent with International Law including International Human Rights Law, grounded in sound public policy, scientific planning and evidence-based decision-making. Recognizing the challenges posed by water scarcity, climate change and population growth, the Government will continue investing in water infrastructure, wastewater treatment and reuse, desalination, digital transformation and institutional capacity.

Finally, the Government of Egypt reaffirms commitment to maintaining constructive engagement with the Human Rights Council and its Special Procedures, based on objectivity, accuracy, mutual respect and recognition of national circumstances, with the shared objective of advancing the effective realization of the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. We look forward to continuing constructive dialogue and technical cooperation with the mandate holder and other relevant partners in support of these shared objectives, while fully respecting national priorities, development needs and institutional frameworks.