



2014:62

Sida Decentralised Evaluation

Robin Ludwig

# Egypt Parliamentary and Presidential Elections Witnessing Project (2011-2012)

Final Report



# Egypt Parliamentary and Presidential Elections Witnessing Project (2011-2012)

**Final Report  
August 2012**

**Robin Ludwig**

**Authors:** Robin Ludwig

The views and interpretations expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida.

**Sida Decentralised Evaluation 2014:62**

Commissioned by Sida

**Copyright:** Sida and the authors

**Date of final report:** August 2012

**Published** by Citat 2014

**Art. no.** Sida61823en

urn:nbn:se:sida-61823en

This publication can be downloaded from: <http://www.sida.se/publications>

---

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

Address: S-105 25 Stockholm, Sweden. Office: Valhallavägen 199, Stockholm

Telephone: +46 (0)8-698 50 00. Telefax: +46 (0)8-20 88 64

E-mail: [info@sida.se](mailto:info@sida.se). Homepage: <http://www.sida.se>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February 2011, in the context of the Arab Spring, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was ousted from office and the Supreme Council of Armed Military Forces (SCAF) took control of the Egyptian Government. The SCAF announced that power would be transferred to an elected civilian government after an appropriate interim period. In anticipation of parliamentary and presidential elections, The Carter Center (TCC) established a presence in Egypt in May 2011. Its field representative began to monitor political developments and to establish contact with Egyptian government officials, political parties and civil society organizations (CSOs) in order to discuss the potential role and benefits of international election observation.

In July, however, the SCAF announced that, in order to preserve Egyptian sovereignty, international observation of the elections would not be allowed. Despite this announcement, the Carter Center, through its Field Office Director, persisted in discussions with national stakeholders. In the meantime, voter registration and initial preparations for elections began.

As the dates for the parliamentary elections grew nearer, President Jimmy Carter spoke by telephone with Field Marshall Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, Head of the SCAF, and raised the issue of international observation. Shortly thereafter, discussions began on the conditions for such observation. Although international observers were to be designated as "witnesses" in Egypt, their functions would be the same as those of international observers elsewhere. This was the first time that Egypt would invite international witnesses to observe elections.

The primary goals of The Carter Center's election witnessing mission in Egypt were a) to provide an independent and credible assessment of the elections and b) to promote the creation of a free and transparent political system through its assessment of the electoral processes. Between 40 and 102 Long-, Medium- and Short-Term Witnesses (LTWs, MTWs and STWs) were deployed to all 27 governorates over the course of the elections. Their observations led to the publication of ten separate statements on the conduct of the elections and on the political environment in which they took place. The Carter Center provided more extensive coverage of the elections than any other international organization.

However, the project was conducted in the face of extremely challenging conditions that jeopardized both its viability and credibility. Three major obstacles affected the mission: a) the resistance of many

Egyptian officials to international election assistance; b) the late accreditation of The Carter Center to witness both the parliamentary and presidential elections; and c) the additional restrictions on witnessing imposed for the presidential election.

Due to the late accreditation, TCC witnesses were unable to observe voter registration and many preparatory activities for the elections; such activities are an integral component of election observation given their importance for the election events that follow. The additional restrictions that were imposed on witnessing the presidential election were unprecedented and, to some extent, reflected a broader Egyptian distrust of external assistance and potential foreign influence.

Given the importance of the Egyptian elections, The Carter Center took a calculated risk and remained to witness both the parliamentary and presidential elections. Comments were made only on those components of the elections that it was able to witness. For the presidential election, it announced that it would conduct a "limited mission." The standards used for assessing each election, however, were consistent with international standards used in assessing other elections in countries around the world.

In carrying out the Egypt Elections Witnessing Project, The Carter Center fulfilled and actually exceeded its goals. By remaining in Egypt for the parliamentary and presidential elections, TCC was able to comment on electoral and political events through both cycles of elections, foster a cooperative working relationship with the Supreme Judicial Commission for Elections (SJCE) and the Presidential Election Commission (PEC) and contribute to improvements in election administration at that time and for the future.

# THE CARTER CENTER MISSION TO WITNESS THE PARLIAMENTARY AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN EGYPT (2011-2012)

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess whether, and to what extent, The Carter Center (TCC) achieved its goals in witnessing Egypt's recent parliamentary and presidential elections. These goals were:

- To provide an impartial and credible assessment of Egypt's electoral processes and
- To promote a free and transparent political system in Egypt through its assessment of the electoral processes.

To achieve those goals, The Carter Center focused on three main activities: a) deployment of international witnesses (observers); b) publication of reports and statements based on witness observations and assessments, and c) presentation of recommendations for improving future electoral processes.

This evaluation is qualitative; it began with a review of project documentation, observer surveys conducted by TCC and public statements and reports by TCC and other relevant organizations. The evaluation is also based on a series of interviews, conducted in person and by telephone, as well as responses to e-mail questionnaires, with 39 individuals familiar with the work of The Carter Center in Egypt. These individuals included:

- Egyptian stakeholders (including senior representatives of the two election commissions, relevant government offices, civil society organizations (CSOs) and two political parties)
- Representatives of international organizations and diplomatic missions based in Cairo, and
- The Carter Center staff and witnesses based in Egypt and staff based in Atlanta.

A list of those who contributed to the evaluation is provided in the Annex to this report.

This evaluation was initiated shortly after the conclusion of the run-off Presidential Election in late June. Although efforts were made to interview as many national stakeholders as possible, the beginning of Ramadan on

July 20<sup>th</sup> complicated that process. As a result, there were fewer responses from political party representatives than had been anticipated.

The evaluation is divided into four sections. The first of these summarizes the activities of The Carter Center in Egypt, beginning in May 2011 through June 2012. The second section provides insight into the views and experiences of people familiar with the mission and highlights major issues that arose in its conduct, focusing first on the parliamentary elections and then the presidential election. A third section identifies lessons learned and offers recommendations for future work. The fourth section provides general conclusions regarding the work of The Carter Center in Egypt.



## I. SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

### A. WITNESSING THE PARLIAMENTARY AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

The Carter Center established a field presence in Cairo in May 2011, approximately two months before the beginning of voter registration in July. The Field Representative monitored political developments and began discussions with relevant Government officials, CSOs and other national stakeholders to clarify the role of international election observers and explain the potential benefits of their presence for Egypt. In July, however, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) announced that international observation would not be permitted in order to preserve Egyptian sovereignty.

The Carter Center and other international organizations persisted in efforts to obtain accreditation for international observers. Voter registration was completed in September 2011 without any international observation of the process. However, following a telephone conversation on 26 September between former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Field Marshall Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, the SCAF Head, official discussions of international observation of the parliamentary elections began. Although the Egyptian authorities objected to the word “observer” (due to its translated meaning in Arabic), they agreed to authorize the presence of international “witnesses.” The first Carter Center observers were accredited as witnesses for the Parliamentary Elections on 2 November, and ultimately performed the standard functions of international observers. Due to the late accreditation, however, they were unable to witness voter registration, many pre-election preparations and much of the campaign.

The parliamentary elections included elections for two separate legislative bodies: the National People's Assembly (lower house) and the Shura Council (upper house). The People's Assembly elections were conducted in three phases across Egypt's 27 governorates; each phase involved two days of voting in nine governorates plus two days for run-off elections. Dates of the People's Assembly elections were:

- 28-29 November; 5-6 December for the run-off
- 14-15 December; 21-22 December for the run-off
- 3-4 January; 10-11 January for the run-off

The Shura Council elections took place in two phases covering all 27 governorates:

- 29-30 January; 7 February for the run-off
- 14-15 February; 22 February for the run-off.

The Carter Center deployed some 40 Long- and Medium-Term Witnesses (LTWs and MTWs) from 23 countries as well as a Core Team of Experts to cover the parliamentary elections. Witnesses were present in all 27 governorates for the People's Assembly elections and in 21 governorates for the Shura Council elections.

Over the course of the elections, TCC issued eight public statements. The statements noted the technical strengths and weaknesses of the elections as well as important elements of the political environment. They also offered recommendations for future elections and took note of improvements made over the course of the elections. In accordance with standard practice, TCC assessments of the elections were based on The Declaration of Principles for International Observation and the Code of Conduct for International Observers (adopted at the United Nations in 2005). In addition, assessments were made in accordance with the Regulations and Code of Conduct for Elections Followers issued by Egypt's Supreme Judicial Commission for Elections, Egypt's national legal framework and relevant obligations contained in its regional and international agreements.

Accreditation for the presidential election proved even more elusive than for the parliamentary elections. Although the election was scheduled for 23-24 May, the Presidential Election Commission provided accreditation on 3 May, followed by the necessary individual authorization badges on 16 May, less than a week before the election. In addition to the late accreditation, the PEC placed unprecedented restrictions on the work of witnesses, including:

- A prohibition on issuing statements prior to the final announcement of results;
- A 30 minute time limit on polling station visits by witnesses;
- A prohibition on access to the final aggregation of results.

Based on these restrictions, the mission was seriously compromised in its ability to provide a credible assessment of the election. However, given the political importance of the Presidential Election and Egypt's political transition, The Carter Center decided to remain, conducting a "limited mission" that focused only on voting, counting and vote tabulation. As a result, The Carter Center became one of only two international organizations to witness and comment on every electoral event of the parliamentary and presidential elections.

Given a lead time of less than a week before the election, The Carter Center brought 102 LTWs and STWs from 35 countries to Cairo, briefed and deployed them to 25 of 27 governorates (excluding North and South Sinai due to security concerns). Based on their assessments, TCC issued two public statements commenting on the presidential election process and the political context and offering recommendations for improving future elections. The Carter Center found that the voting and counting processes were “free from major and systemic flaws that unfairly advantaged either candidate”, but noted that, due to the limited scope of the mission, it could not draw conclusions about the overall election process. The Carter Center made clear that the PEC’s restrictions were contrary to the basic principles of credible and effective observation, and it would not observe again under such conditions.

## B. POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

In reviewing the activities of The Carter Center mission in Egypt, the political context requires special mention. Uncertainties related to Egypt’s political transition had a profound effect on The Carter Center’s witnessing mission. Three elements of the political environment were especially important: a) the fragility of Egypt’s political transition; b) Egypt’s past experience of foreign intervention and c) the historic significance of these elections.

Egypt’s volatile political situation was a continuing concern over the eight months of elections. During the parliamentary elections, the SCAF continued to rule the country, and Egyptians remained subject to Emergency Law. Civil society organizations (CSOs) were strictly regulated and political dissent was prohibited in the state-run media. Despite earlier promises of an early return to civilian rule, the SCAF temporized until renewed civil unrest and political pressures led them to announce May 23-24 as the dates for the presidential election. On 14 June, two days before the presidential run-off election, the newly elected Parliament was declared dissolved, and on 17 June, just prior to the announcement of the presidential run-off results, the SCAF issued a constitutional addendum granting itself expanded powers. The course of Egypt’s political transition remained precarious and unpredictable throughout the eight months of the elections.

A second political factor for international organizations to reckon with was Egypt’s legacy of foreign interference. Many government officials were suspicious of international election assistance, and their mistrust led to misunderstandings and lost opportunities for effective international support. This became most apparent at the end of December 2011 when the Government raided 17 international and domestic pro-democracy

and human rights organizations. The raids resulted in the departure of all international observation organizations except The Carter Center, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) and the Elections Network in the Arab Region (ENAR).

A third factor that affected the mission was the historical importance of the elections. They were the first to be held in the post-Mubarak era, and marked the first time in Egyptian history that the head of state was directly elected by Egyptian voters in a competitive election. As a consequence, the election management bodies (EMBs) were new to their responsibilities, electoral procedures were often vague or unspecified and the roles of election administrators, party agents and security services were often unclear. Many of the voters were also uncertain and wary of voting. Based on the significance of the elections, not only for Egypt but for the region, the need for an impartial and credible assessment of their conduct was essential.

International observation generally takes place in a supportive and open environment in which a government welcomes the work of international observers. The government's goal, at least in part, is to demonstrate its commitment to conducting a credible and transparent process. Election commissions usually accredit observers early enough for them to assess voter registration; they also ensure that observers have open and unimpeded access to polling stations through the final vote count. This was not the experience of The Carter Center in witnessing Egypt's parliamentary and presidential elections.

## II. SURVEY VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES

### A. PURPOSE OF THE CARTER CENTER MISSION IN EGYPT

National stakeholders and members of the international community shared a good understanding of the purpose of The Carter Center's work in Egypt. Several of those interviewed noted that the presence of TCC witnesses had been "a useful hedge against fraud," an "effective means of encouraging transparency" and an important source of validation for the elections. The Carter Center also contributed to "demystifying observation" and demonstrated that criticism could be supportive and helpful. The majority of those interviewed believed that, despite the Government of Egypt's resistance to outside assistance, The Carter Center fulfilled its primary purpose as well as was possible.

The Carter Center was also credited with a significant and unintended achievement. Some of those interviewed suggested that The Carter Center made a critical contribution simply by remaining in Egypt despite the July 2011 announcement that international observation was prohibited. Due largely to the efforts of President Carter and the persistence of TCC staff, the prohibition was later overturned and international and domestic organizations were allowed to witness the elections.

Some of those interviewed noted that, five years ago, the presence of international observers in the Middle East was a rare occurrence. Based on The Carter Center's efforts in Egypt and Egypt's regional importance, international witnessing was becoming much better understood and accepted within the region.

### B. STANDARDS FOR ASSESSMENT

While some Egyptians suggested that particular mention should have been made of Egypt's special political/electoral context, the majority of those interviewed agreed that the standards used by TCC to assess the elections were appropriate. Most were convinced that the Egyptian authorities were capable of organizing and conducting credible elections and should be held to that standard. It was suggested that if "the bar were lowered for these elections," it would be difficult to raise the bar to the proper level for future elections.

### C. PERIODIC STATEMENTS

Over the course of the parliamentary and presidential elections, TCC published 10 statements – eight during the parliamentary elections and two for the presidential election. Press conferences were held during the two visits of President Carter and following the final round of the

presidential election. The visits of President Carter attracted considerable media attention; TCC statements, however, were not widely discussed by the Egyptian media, civil society organizations or political parties. Several of those interviewed explained that the Egyptian public was more concerned with domestic politics than on international statements about the elections.

TCC statements focused on both technical and political aspects of the elections, also noting weaknesses and strengths in the election administration. Some of those interviewed suggested that the statements should have included reporting on campaign finance and more analysis and statistical data about the electorate. Others suggested that the statements should have given greater emphasis to the technical improvements made over the successive rounds of the parliamentary elections.

A particular source of controversy was the reference in TCC statements to the political situation in Egypt. Some Egyptians insisted that the statements should have referred only to the technical elements of the elections and excluded comments on the political environment (i.e., the Emergency Law, the low level of women's participation in the parliamentary elections, the quotas for farmers and workers, the transfer of power to elected civilians and the dissolution of the People's Assembly). However, the majority of those interviewed, including many Egyptians, stressed that elections could not be separated from the political context in which they took place. Two of those interviewed commented that "elections do not take place in a vacuum," and ignoring the political environment would make the observation "a joke."

The actual impact of TCC's public statements is difficult to measure. Among those interviewed, no one considered the actual number of statements published to be important, and the timing and tone of the statements were generally considered appropriate. As noted above, many of the Egyptians who were interviewed suggested that the Egyptian public was most focused on national affairs and was not particularly interested in the statements of international organizations. However, based on the comments of several different target audiences, the statements likely served a variety of purposes.

For government and election officials, the statements were of considerable interest and generated many discussions with TCC staff. During the parliamentary elections, the statements provided a useful basis for TCC staff to discuss best practices in election administration with the SJCE, and many of the weaknesses identified in the statements were remedied in later elections. For example, ballot boxes and security

materials were upgraded, voter lists were posted outside polling stations and the vote count was moved from counting centers to polling stations.

In addition to the technical improvements that followed recommendations made during the parliamentary elections, public statements by President Carter in January 2012 may have contributed to the scheduling of the presidential election in May. While in Egypt for the parliamentary elections, President Carter expressed repeated concern about the military's continuing control of the government. Although direct causality cannot be proved, several of those interviewed believed that President Carter's comments influenced the SCAF's decision to announce a May date for the presidential election.

Based on comments by those interviewed, TCC statements on the elections reassured voters of the credibility and validity of the elections, despite their flaws, and assisted the SJCE and the PEC in identifying weaknesses and improving the administration of the elections. They were also considered by many to be a means of expressing political concerns to the Government that could not have been made easily on a bilateral or multilateral basis.

#### D. COOPERATION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

The Carter Center was consistently praised for its efforts to build and maintain collegial relationships with other international organizations and members of the international community. Given the volatility and uncertainty of the political and electoral environment, TCC staff and others shared and compared information to ensure accurate interpretations of legal analyses and understanding of rules and procedures. Information on political developments was also shared, and TCC staff frequently contributed to donor and observer briefings. There was no formal coordination of deployments among witnessing groups, although international witnesses were encouraged to compare notes where possible.

The Carter Center staff and President Jimmy Carter in particular were credited with facilitating the accreditation of both international and domestic witnessing organizations. Several people praised The Carter Center "for cutting the path to official accreditation for all the other international observers to follow." The Carter Center was also cited by a number of those interviewed as the "leader" of the witnessing efforts, the international organization with the most political weight and the ability to "cut through the bureaucracy" to facilitate the work of all international and domestic witnessing organizations.

During the parliamentary elections, each international witnessing group drafted statements on the elections based on its witness observations;

their statements were usually shared and “the general themes” were always found to be similar. TCC statements often confirmed the electoral weaknesses that were noted by other international organizations (i.e., location of the vote count; illicit campaigning; lack of complaints procedures).

The Carter Center staff met frequently with the SJCE and the PEC to discuss the organization and conduct of elections and, in particular the content of TCC statements. These discussions provided an opportunity for TCC to build a cooperative relationship with the election management bodies (EMBs), particularly the SJCE. Based on the working experience with the SJCE, a relationship of trust and openness developed that may hold promise for further cooperation on elections in the future. The parliamentary elections may have been a first step toward countering Egyptian suspicions and resistance to outside influence.

The Carter Center also maintained good relations with domestic organizations, including political parties and CSOs. CSOs were particularly appreciative of TCC’s efforts on their behalf in obtaining accreditation as domestic witnesses. The Carter Center witnessing mission also served as a model for domestic witnessing organizations, most of whom had no previous experience. Some CSOs expressed regret that there had not been closer cooperation with The Carter Center and expressed a hope that The Carter Center might give them practical guidance for witnessing future elections.

## E. DECISION TO WITNESS THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

The decision of The Carter Center to witness the presidential election, given the restrictions on its work, was difficult and not without risk. A significant majority of those interviewed, however, agreed with its decision to stay. A commonly expressed conviction was that, given the importance of the election, it was better to remain and have an opportunity for influence than to leave and lose any means of pressure. The two public statements issued by The Carter Center on the elections were widely praised for being extremely honest and direct – surpassing many expectations. Those statements would not have been possible if The Carter Center had departed, and they raised the organization’s credibility among many of those interviewed.

Other reasons for remaining in Egypt included the view that “withdrawal of The Carter Center would have signified that the election wasn’t good – which would have been a big political issue.” Some noted that, by remaining in Egypt, TCC served as an important source of information for the organizations that had been ousted. In contrast, others suggested that “a withdrawal would have been news for one day” and then



forgotten “because the focus in Egypt was not on external reporting.” A final comment suggested that Egypt created “its own worst nightmare” by imposing extreme restrictions in a difficult political context that became the focus of The Carter Center’s comments.

Among those who supported a decision to withdraw, there was concern that the government would manipulate The Carter Center’s presence for its own purposes. A few interviewees noted that, after the first round of elections, the PEC referred to The Carter Center as a proof of legitimacy. Another view was that a “limited mission” was not useful because it confused the issue of what constituted a credible election. According to this view, The Carter Center statement that “most aspects” of the June 16-17 voting and counting process were free of major flaws cast doubt on the viability of the entire process. An assumption that the process was generally credible was not clearly supported, and rumors of fraud were cited in relation to the collection of voting results from the governorates.

#### F. THE CARTER CENTER OBSERVATION MANAGEMENT

Two particular challenges affected the management of the Egypt mission:

- The constant prospect that TCC’s Egypt mission might have to be closed;
- The substantive constraints that jeopardized the credibility of its witnessing activities.

The Carter Center has a well-developed operational plan of layered deployments that has been used successfully over many years. However, the delays in accreditation made the phased and timely deployment of witnesses impossible and credible observation of the elections extremely difficult.

LTOs are usually deployed several months before elections. Accordingly, The Carter Center had planned to deploy LTWs in July 2011 in order to witness voter registration. In the absence of accreditation, however, The Carter Center faced a risk that, if it deployed LTWs early on the assumption that they would be accredited, the accreditation might not be granted, and TCC would find itself sponsoring a large group of people in Egypt with no official functions. A decision was made, in the case of both the parliamentary and presidential elections, to wait for accreditation. As a result, all of the international witnesses were deployed only shortly before voting began and, counter to international observation standards, the mission could not witness or comment on the important early phases of either election.

Many witnesses and others praised The Carter Center field office staff, particularly the Field Office Director. National staff members were also cited frequently for their excellent contributions to the work of the Cairo office. Some suggested that, in future, it might be useful to add a staff member dedicated to CSO relations. The field office staff was supplemented with a core team of experts on gender issues, media and election administration. Although only the election administration expert remained throughout the eight month mission, the other experts visited periodically during the People's Assembly elections to provide additional expertise and advice. Their contributions were praised by several staff members, and there were suggestions that, in future, they should receive more managerial oversight and be better integrated into the work of the field office. They might also be requested to prepare papers for publication in their areas of expertise. The inclusion of a Gender Expert was considered particularly important and support was expressed for mainstreaming gender issues into future witnessing work.

Witnesses generally found the pre-deployment trainings helpful and interesting. Witnesses received briefings on the terms of reference and code of conduct for international witnesses, as well as political, electoral, legal and security briefings. Some witnesses mentioned that simulation exercises and a focus on practical applications was particularly useful; they suggested that more simulations should be incorporated into future briefings. A further suggestion was made that more experienced witnesses should not be required to attend all of the briefing sessions provided for new witnesses.

There was particular praise for the use of TCC's Election Monitoring (ELMO) electronic reporting system through the use of tablets. ELMO was relatively easy to use, provided close to real time data, and eliminated the need for Excel spreadsheets. The tablets were also credited with appearing less intrusive in polling stations than the hard copy checklists. Given the choice between using the tablets and the checklists, most witnesses chose to use the tablets. Although improvements can still be made, ELMO was welcomed as an important new use of technology for international observation.

In terms of the witnessing experience, some witnesses for the parliamentary elections expressed dissatisfaction with the use of their time and the division of labor while they were in the field. They stated that there were periods of too much work and other times when they had very little to do. However, these complaints may reflect the time constraints that persisted throughout the parliamentary elections, as witnesses moved to different governorates for elections every few weeks over the course of three months. A number of witnesses also complained about a lack of

feedback from the Cairo Office on their field reporting. This complaint was addressed and alleviated by a staffing change prior to the presidential election. In general, however, the witnesses for the parliamentary and presidential elections expressed a good understanding of their role and appreciated the opportunity to serve The Carter Center as witnesses.

#### G. THE IMPACT OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S INVOLVEMENT

When asked about reactions to President Carter's visits and statements during the elections, the responses were very positive. He remains highly respected in Egypt and appreciated for his role in the Camp David Accords. He is also viewed as independent and not "an arm of the U.S. Government." His presence raised the visibility of the electoral process and generated media attention both inside and outside Egypt.

Many of those interviewed suggested that President Carter's special high level access allowed him to influence several key moments during the electoral process. These included the SCAF decision to allow international witnesses; his discussion with Field Marshall Tantawi of the December 2011 raids by the Government of Egypt on international and domestic pro-democracy and human rights organizations; his public comments on the SCAF's promise of a timely transfer of power to an elected, civilian government (which may have influenced the SCAF in scheduling the presidential election in May) and his later comments regarding the political events of May and June. His expressions of political concern were particularly welcomed by members of the international community. His statements, together with the published reports of The Carter Center, were commended for their direct and honest comments about the political environment that others were not able or willing to make.

In addition to President Carter's political influence, members of the international community were grateful for his willingness to meet privately in January 2012 with staff of several of the organizations that were raided by the Egyptian police. They appreciated the opportunity to share and discuss their concerns with him. His initiative in discussing the issue of the raids with both Field Marshall Tantawi and the representatives of the targeted organizations was viewed by many as a further example of the cooperative and collegial approach of The Carter Center as an institution.

#### H. PROJECT ADMINISTRATION

The challenges faced by The Carter Center in managing the Egypt mission also affected its general administration. Given the uncertainty related to accreditation and the continued viability of the mission, initial fundraising for the mission was problematic. As a result, The Carter Center instituted stop-gap funding arrangements in order to ensure the timely start-up of

the mission. Although funding was later secured for the elections and a constitutional referendum, political events have postponed conduct of the referendum.

The working relationship of staff at Atlanta Headquarters and the Cairo Field Office was excellent, with regular communication by e-mail and at least once weekly discussions on Skype. Statements were drafted in Cairo and cleared in Atlanta, and decisions on issues such as recruitment, deployment, policy and political questions were discussed by staff in the two offices. Interviews of prospective candidates were often conducted jointly, and staffing problems identified during the Parliamentary Elections were effectively resolved by the two offices prior to the Presidential Elections. The project manager in Atlanta was praised by many of the field staff for her continuing support and availability while avoiding micro-managing. In view of the effectiveness of the Field/HQ relationship, a review of the organizational structures and communications channels might be useful in order to replicate the experience in other missions.

### III. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Carter Center has extensive experience in the organization and conduct of election observation missions. However, TCC's mission for the Egyptian elections was unusually problematic given Egypt's political volatility, the uncertainties of the mission context, time constraints, and the technical and political limitations placed on the mission's activities. Based on this experience, a number of lessons and recommendations may be of value for the future work of The Carter Center.

#### A. BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The Carter Center is known for its cooperative and collegial approach in working with others. In keeping with this approach, The Carter Center staff spent significant amounts of time seeking to foster relationships of trust and cooperation with Egyptian counterparts. They experienced particular success in working with the SJCE; over successive elections, the SJCE found that the international criticism offered by The Carter Center was helpful and supportive. Their working relationship helped to generate important improvements in the parliamentary elections.

Representatives of international electoral assistance organizations and CSOs expressed special appreciation for TCC's willingness to lend support when they faced political or operational difficulties. The Carter Center was widely praised for its negotiation of witnessing accreditation not only for itself, but for all international and domestic witnessing groups. The Carter Center was acknowledged by many to be the leader of the electoral assistance community.

Recommendation: The Carter Center should continue its cooperative approach and build on the relationships it has established with Egyptian counterparts for work in future elections. The Carter Center might also consider engaging more with Egypt's fledgling domestic witnessing organizations. They expressed keen interest in professionalizing their witnessing efforts and suggested that The Carter Center might help them with practical activities such as planning deployments, adopting assessment criteria and drafting statements on elections. Sponsorship of a regional conference of domestic witnessing organizations might also be considered. In planning such activities The Carter Center should bear in mind Egyptian sensitivities vis-à-vis outside influence and the experiences of several peer organizations with the Egyptian authorities over the past year.

## B. COMMUNICATION WITHIN EGYPT

Although The Carter Center's statements were distributed to the electoral commissions, relevant government offices, CSOs, political parties and the media, they were not widely discussed except by the SJCE and the PEC. Egyptians were described as more interested in domestic politics than in international statements on the elections. However, broader discussion of electoral processes and events could contribute to more effective participation of Egyptians in future elections. The visits and press conferences of President Carter were covered well by the media, but no other press conferences were organized.

Recommendations: The mission should have an initial media strategy that identifies key national and international stakeholders to ensure effective outreach and communication throughout the process. Initial contact lists should be expanded as appropriate to ensure effective and regular distribution of statements, not only to central offices but to the governorates. Consideration should be given to holding a press conference (with Arabic interpretation) at the time of issuing of statements in order to clarify the statements and avoid potential misunderstandings. Consideration should be given to including a CSO specialist in the Core Team of Experts. Political parties could also benefit from increased information and contact and have potential for exerting considerable pressure on the Government of Egypt for improving future elections.

## C. STANDARDS

The majority of those interviewed stated that the recognized international standards for assessing the elections were appropriate, despite the special circumstances in which the elections took place. Several people expressed the view that modifying the standards for these elections would only have created difficulties for determining the standards for the next elections.

Recommendation: The Carter Center should continue to utilize the Declaration of Principles for International Observation and Code of Conduct that was adopted in 2005 for assessing democratic elections. These should be complemented by national codes of conduct and legal obligations related to elections. By using such standards as a reference, The Carter Center can maintain its impartiality while offering suggestions for improvements.

## D. DECISION TO WITNESS THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The Carter Center took a calculated risk in deciding to witness the presidential election and was rightly concerned about jeopardizing the credibility of international observation. Despite the restrictions on

witnessing activities, its presence allowed continued engagement with the PEC and an opportunity to issue statements on a critical electoral process and its political context. An impressive majority of those interviewed asserted that the benefits of staying outweighed the arguments for withdrawal. The Carter Center was widely praised for maintaining the credibility of its witnessing operation while offering frank comments about the political environment. Through its work, The Carter Center also affirmed the relevance of the 2005 Declaration of Principles for International Observation.

Recommendation: In difficult electoral contexts, The Carter Center should continue to weigh the costs and benefits of observation on a case by case basis. By taking a nuanced approach, opportunities may be found to provide important assistance that will lead to further improvements in elections. The 2005 Declaration was demonstrated to be a useful tool in addressing such cases for observation; its relevance and applications in such contexts might be discussed at a future international review conference.

#### E. MISSION UNCERTAINTIES

Based on questions that arose related to the mission's accreditation, its status following the raids by the Government of Egypt on peer organizations and continued viability for the presidential election, mission deployment plans were revised many times. This led to administrative difficulties with recruitment, ticketing, and visa procurement as well as challenges to the mission's core purpose of providing credible assessments of electoral processes. The mission achieved its goals, but with high costs in terms of staff time and effort, witness complaints, and potentially less observation depth due to a reduced number of observers.

Recommendation: The mission's experience with contingency planning should be reviewed and assessed to identify strengths and weaknesses in mission planning and deployment that should be replicated or improved. For example, establishment of an effective database for recruitment of LTWs and STWs, including past experience and work evaluations, would help to streamline future hiring of long and short-term staff.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

The 2011-2012 elections marked the first time that the Government of Egypt invited international witnesses to observe elections. Despite considerable obstacles, The Carter Center deployed up to 102 international witnesses to assess the three phases of the parliamentary elections and the two rounds of presidential election. The Carter Center was one of only two international organizations to witness, assess and comment upon each electoral event during an eight month period of elections.

The periodic statements and reports of The Carter Center on the elections contributed to improvements in successive elections and provided a continuing reference for further enhancement of Egypt's election administration. However, the statements provided two additional and unexpected benefits. First, they provided a basis for TCC to build a working relationship with the election commissions, particularly the SJCE. Over 26 days of voting, the SJCE came to realize that international witnessing was aimed at offering constructive suggestions rather than criticism. Second, the statements provided an opportunity for frank comments about the political environment. Although such statements were not necessarily welcomed by government officials, The Carter Center was praised by many for its honesty and willingness to say what others would or could not.

In fulfilling the goals of its mission, The Carter Center overcame unprecedented obstacles. Resistance to international witnessing, operational delays and challenges to the integrity of the mission led to constant uncertainty as to its continued viability. However, by taking a calculated risk and remaining in Egypt for both the parliamentary and presidential elections, The Carter Center helped to create expectations and establish standards for the conduct of future elections. Its efforts also contributed to better understanding and acceptance of international observation, not only in Egypt but within the region.

Both the Cairo and Atlanta staff deserve particular praise for their persistence and dedication in carrying out a difficult but critical operation for Egypt's political transition. Through their efforts, The Carter Center also gained increased credibility for its leadership role in providing international assistance. Based on Egypt's experience with the 2011-2012 elections, The Carter Center should be prepared to witness elections again in the not too distant future.



# ANNEX

## CONTRIBUTORS TO THE EVALUATION

### NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS:

#### ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

---

Counsellor Alaa Kotb	Supreme Judicial Commission for Elections (SJCE)
Counsellor Hatem Bagato	Presidential Election Commission (PEC)
Judge Sara Adly	PEC
Gen. Rifaat Qomsan	Ministry of the Interior
Ambassador Leila Bahaaldin	Ministry of Foreign Affairs

#### POLITICAL PARTY REPRESENTATIVES

---

Mohammed Nosseir	Democratic Front Party
Hany Tarek	Karama Party

#### REPRESENTATIVES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

---

Ziad Abdel Tawab	Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
Mohamed Zaree	Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
Dalia Ziada	Ibn Khaldun Center
Tarek Zaghloul Asran	Egyptian Organization for Human Rights
Hazem Mounier	National Council for Human Rights

### INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:

Justin Doua	Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa
Julie Hughes	National Democratic Institute
Sam LaHood	International Republican Institute
Mariela Lopez	United Nations Development Programme

Fida Nasrallah	International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)
Lars Vogtmann Sorensen	Government of Denmark
Pieter Blusse	Government of the Netherlands
Monique Bouman	Government of the Netherlands
Nini Pharo Halle	Government of Norway
Frederik Uggla	Government of Sweden
Romain Darbellay	Government of Switzerland
Sibylle Stamm	Government of Switzerland
Sam Grout-Smith	Government of the United Kingdom
Jennifer Upton	Government of the United Kingdom

#### INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS:

---

Leticia Troncoso Perera	Long-term TCC Witness
Muhammad Al-Musbeh	Long-term TCC Witness

#### THE CARTER CENTER:

##### CAIRO:

---

Sanne van den Bergh	Field Office Director
Ebie du Pont	Deputy Field Office Director
Zizette Darkazally	Senior Program Manager
Phillip McInerney	Security Officer
Sherif Alaa Abdelazim	Election Administration Associate

##### ATLANTA:

---

John Hardman	President and Chief Executive Officer
Kathy Cade	Board Member
David Carroll	Director, Democracy Program
Avery Davis-Roberts	Assistant Director, Dem. Program

Paul Linnell

Assistant Project Coordinator

Aliya Naim

Assistant Project Coordinator



## Egypt Parliamentary and Presidential Elections Witnessing Project (2011-2012)

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY

Address: S-105 25 Stockholm, Sweden. Office: Valhallavägen 199, Stockholm

Telephone: +46 (0)8-698 50 00. Telefax: +46 (0)8-20 88 64

E-mail: [info@sida.se](mailto:info@sida.se). Homepage: <http://www.sida.se>

