



## Egypt's First National Youth Conference: Fulfilling the Aspirations of the Next Generation

From 25-27 October, President Abdel Fattah El Sisi, a number of cabinet ministers and other senior government officials joined 3,000 young Egyptians – university students, media representatives, political activists and those working in science, art, culture and sports – in Sharm El Sheikh for an open exchange on how to fulfill the aspirations of Egyptian youth and address the political, economic and cultural challenges facing Egypt. The first annual youth conference came as a key part of the government's effort to expand engagement with the 52 percent of Egypt's population that is aged 24 or younger.

President El Sisi, who attended all three days of the conference, encouraged participants and all young Egyptians to speak openly about the key issues facing their generation, including:

Education

The Economy

Political  
Participation

Freedom of  
Expression

Reforming  
Religious  
Discourse

- **EDUCATION:** Government officials and youth representatives discussed reducing illiteracy; enhancing access to technology, the Internet and social networking sites; and the need to retrain teachers. President El Sisi stressed that education is a pillar of development, and should include not only scientific and vocational instruction but cultural guidance as well, to prevent extremism in the younger generation. He noted that the Presidency's Advisory Board on Education and Scientific Research has already begun to reform Egypt's education system by developing a knowledge bank that any Egyptian can access.
- **ECONOMY:** Participants discussed improving youth participation in formulating economic policies, and more closely aligning labor market needs with the construction of national projects to reduce unemployment. Conferees also urged for greater support and financing for small and medium-sized enterprises. President El Sisi met with a group of investors from Sharm El Sheikh and youth working in the tourism industry, noting the government's commitment to providing support for tourism, which employs many of Egypt's young people.



- **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:** Conference attendees discussed training more young people in politics and took part in a workshop simulating the ways in which the Egyptian state operates and responds to citizens' concerns. President El Sisi expressed support for expanding Egypt's Presidential Leadership Program, which helps young future leaders acquire skills in business and public administration through community service activities, guest speaker sessions and field visits. The President also encouraged young people to participate in the upcoming local elections, urging graduates of the Presidential Leadership Program to become assistants to MPs, ministers and governors.



- › **FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION:** Participants discussed the important role of the media in providing space for national debate. President El Sisi reiterated the government's commitment to freedom of expression while stressing that the media should uphold standards of accuracy and impartiality. The President also called for the formation of a working group made up of young people to review the status of incarcerated youths who have not been involved in acts of violence and have not been issued final judicial verdicts.
- › **RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE:** The conference brought Christians and Muslims together to discuss their common Egyptian identity. They debated integrating moderate religious discourse into elementary school curricula to prevent young people from turning to extremism. President El Sisi stressed that religion is a private matter, that all Egyptians should be provided with the right of freedom of worship and that rebuilding the Egyptian identity and reforming religious conflict will require a culture of tolerance and co-existence.



## THESE FRANK DISCUSSIONS AND OPEN DEBATES RESULTED IN A CLEAR SET OF AGREED-UPON RECOMMENDATIONS AND DIRECTIVES AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE CONFERENCE, INCLUDING:

- 1 The formation of a national committee to review the cases of young people held in pretrial detention.**  
This committee – formed officially on 1 November – will present its findings to President El Sisi, who will then take measures to resolve these cases within the legal powers conferred upon him by the Constitution.
- 2 An agreement by the government to review proposed amendments to the protest law presented at the National Youth Conference,** to then be referred to parliament during the current session.
- 3 The establishment of an expanded dialogue coordinated by the government, Al-Azhar and the Egyptian Church** to sustain the moral principles of society and lay sound foundations for the religious discourse.
- 4 A directive for the Presidency to establish a national center for training young people** through a well-defined curriculum, in order to enhance Egypt's national identity and foster young leadership across all sectors.
- 5 The establishment of a monthly conference for youth,** hosted by the government, with representation from all segments of society, to follow up on the recommendations of the first National Youth Conference in preparation for the second annual conference in 2017.
- 6 A dialogue to be held within one month to make recommendations to reform Egypt's education system,** to result in a national document that outlines untraditional means to reform education. This document shall be presented to the monthly youth conference scheduled in December.
- 7 An invitation to young people to submit proposals for government programs to encourage volunteer work,** with a major emphasis on eradicating illiteracy in certain Egyptian governorates.