Horizons of Cultural and Media
Cooperation between Egypt and Africa

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*E*gypt's belonging to its African arena transcends the traditional, geographic, ethnic and historic dimensions. Such a belonging is considered a main component of the Egyptian identity and a central element in forming the cultural features of the Egyptian character. Furthermore, the African continent occupies a special position in the Egyptian national security system, as Egypt's security starts from there, not to mention the role and importance of the River Nile in the Egyptian civilization.

The Role of the Egyptian-African Institutions in Africa:

The history of the Egyptian-African relations in its cultural dimension points to the rapprochement between both sides, based on the following indicators:

- Egypt's African identity.

- Egypt's geographic location: North Africa, East Africa.

- Common language and doctrine.

- Common history and cultural heritage.

- Its existence among regional and international blocs: AU- UN- OIC- IGAD - COMESA.

In order to realize the Egyptian objectives and strategies in Africa, the role of the following institutions should be highlighted:

1. Al-Azhar:

- Al-Azhar occupies a prestigious position among Muslims all over the world, thanks to its moderate approach and civilizational role in spreading the tolerant teaching and values of Islam. Thereupon, both al-Azhar University and Chiefdom represent one of Egypt's important tools in

dealing with Africa. In this respect, al-Azhar University, in cooperation with the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs and the Ministry of Endowment, offers scholarships for African students and sends scholars to teach in the African religious institutions.

- On the internal level, al-Azhar Foreign Mission City is mainly responsible for direct communication with the expatriate students, especially the Africans, and aims to realize the following objectives: consolidate relations and dissolve the differences between the sons of the Islamic world, face ethnic discrimination, and provide all forms of amenities for students including the cultural, social and sports care.

2. The Egyptian Coptic Church:

- The Egyptian Coptic Church is considered one of the most important tools for implementing the Egyptian foreign and cultural policy towards Africa. This is mainly attributed to the historic ties that link between the Egyptian church and its counterparts in the Sudan and Ethiopia, not to mention its significant role allover Africa since the advent of Christianity to Egypt. The Egyptian Church also enjoys a good reputation in Africa; being a sacred land where popes, patriarchs, saints and martyrs passed through. Moreover, its history does not show any signs of greediness or any colonial intentions towards Africa, but rather seeks to spread peace and benevolence among the African people. The Church is also always keen to assert the solidarity among the African and the Arab People and among the African Muslims and Christians.

3. Ministry of Higher Education:

- The role of the Ministry of Higher Education is emphasized through offering scholarships for African students in the various Egyptian universities and institutes, through signing mutual cooperation agreements in the field of scientific research and studies and through supervising the works of the Egyptian cultural centers. Historically, Egyptian teachers played a prominent role in the educational renaissance in Africa, whether through teaching students or through organizing the educational system. In this respect, Egypt signed various agreements for cultural, scientific and technical exchange in addition to the exchange of teachers with African states.

4. Research and Studies Centers interested in Cooperation with Africa:

- Egypt has many African-related research centers, including the Institute of African Research and Studies- Cairo University, the Center for Information and Decision Support- the Council of Ministers, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, the Center for African Studies- Faculty of Economics and Political Science, the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, the Egyptian International Center for Agriculture, and the Center for Coordination and Cooperation with Africa at the SIS.

- As regards the cultural and scientific relations with Africa, it is noticeable that such centers seek to establish an Egyptian-African scientific and cultural rapprochement, in addition to entrenching the Egyptian African identity and to building a qualified Egyptian and African research staff.

- Actually, all such institutions throughout their history were capable of imposing an Egyptian influence on the African culture. This can be monitored in the following aspects:

- The existence of some Egyptian words in the Swahili language.

- The existence of Pharaonic popular myths in some African peoples.

- The Egyptian presence in the African literature and arts.

- The miscellaneous activities of the Egyptian cultural centers in Africa (seminars, conferences, lectures, theatrical shows.)

- The prominent role of the Luxor African Film Festival, which is considered one of the most important tools for the Egyptian penetration in Africa.

- The Historic role of the African Association in Cairo that embodied the political and cultural cooperation between Egypt and its African arena.

- Providing the religious institutes in African countries with the necessary books, tools and teachers.

- Disseminating the Arabic and Islamic culture allover Africa.

- Translating the works of the Coptic Church to African languages and creating African religious cadres that belong to the African values and culture.

- Offering training scholarships to the African researchers and officials in various fields, including media, judiciary, agriculture and security.

The Role of the Egyptian Media in Africa:

Media contributes to realizing various Egyptian objectives in Africa, including: forming the mental image of Egypt in Africa and vice versa, realizing civilizational communication with Africa, developing the media and information awareness of the Egyptian citizen, and realizing the State's political mission "soft power" according to such objectives. In this respect, various Egyptian institutions are concerned with establishing media cooperation with the African arena, including the State Information Service, the Directed Radio Stations Network, and the African Media Training Institute.

1. State Information Service (SIS):

The SIS; being the State's media body, should always be a significant part in any integrated national strategy towards the African Continent. In the last years, the SIS hosted effective meetings with African media and press delegations representing around 20 African states. Such meetings emphasized various messages such as: entrenching Egypt's African belonging, supporting the developing of African states, and formulating a new system for the Egyptian-African relations. Furthermore, the SIS is keen to diversify its media tools in Africa through opening new media offices there. In this vein, the media offices abroad work on realizing the following objectives:

- Building the bridges of trust and understanding between Egypt and the African states on both the official and popular levels (parliamentarians – parties – civil society organizations).

- Enlightening the African public opinion of Egypt's African identity and belonging and rectifying the distorted image about Egypt's relation with the Africans.

- Establishing strong relations with the African media.

- Providing the African media with the necessary information and data about the situation in Egypt.

2. The Directed Radio Stations:

- The Directed Radio Stations started operating in Egypt on July4, 1954 with the inauguration of Sawt al-Arab or the Voice of the

Arabs Radio which sought to highlight Egypt's role in the Arab world. Afterwards, transmission in various African languages followed, especially in East Africa in the Tigrinya language in 1954, then the Amharic language in 1955 and the Somali language in 1957. English, French, Arabic, Hebrew, Hausa and Fulani languages were also introduced. In 1965, Egypt started a radio transmission with the Zulu language to fight colonialism and to face the Apartheid policies.

- The Directed Radio Stations aimed at getting the Africans acquainted with the various Egyptian civilizational, cultural and educational activities, besides the political affairs, especially with what is related with supporting the liberation movements.

3. African Media Training Institute:

- The Ministry of Information established the African Media Training Institute in 1977 so as to transform the Egyptian media experiences to the African countries and to train the African media men on the state-of-the-art media systems.

- The Institute hosted around 4000 African media man allover its history.

4. Contributing to the establishment of the Pan-African News Agency "PANA":

- PANA entered into force in Dakar on May 25, 1983. Its main aim was to enhance cooperation in the field of information exchange among the African countries. Egypt has contributed in drafting the Agency's law.

5. Hosting the Federation of African Journalists:

- This Federation was established on November 23, 1974 with the membership of 12 federations, including the Egyptian one. Its main objective was to gather and unite the African journalists in one federation that is capable of offering assistance to them and of supporting the African issues, not to mention its vital role in providing communication among the African journalists. In this respect, Egypt offered all facilities for this Federation, thus leading to the issuance of "The African Journalist" Magazine in the Arabic, English and French languages.

6. Media Cooperation Protocols and Agreements:

- Cooperation protocols and agreements are among the Egyp-

tian vital media tools towards the continent. The General Administration of International Relations at the Radio and Television Union (RTU) held 33 media cooperation agreements with African countries, varying between protocols and understanding memorandums. Furthermore, the Egyptian media role had contributed to establishing the African Union of Broadcasting in 1962.

A Strategic Vision over Developing the Egyptian-African Cultural and Media Relations:

- Drafting an Egyptian cultural and media policy that would be an integral part of an integrated Egyptian strategy towards Africa.

- Activating the tools of Egypt's soft power in Africa, and reviving the role of al-Azhar and of the Coptic Church, especially in East and West Africa.

- Activating the enlightenment and educational role of the Egyptian

universities in the African arena.

- Opening new cultural and media offices in Africa.

- Reviving the African heritage in the Egyptian institutions and introducing awards for the African literature and arts.

- Entrenching cooperation with the African civil society organizations.

- Establishing student communication committees inside universities so as to strengthen the ties with the African students inside the Egyptian universities.

- Producing documentary films that would clarify Egypt's African identity in a manner that would reach the African mentality.

- Launching an Egyptian satellite channel in various African languages; putting the African culture and taste into consideration.

- Introducing an overall institutional framework that includes all African media men "African Commission" or "Ministerial Cabinet".