

Human Development Report: 75% of Egyptians below Poverty Line

Al Masry Al Yawm

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Dr. Nader Fergani, the main editor of the Global Human Development Report, put four criteria for poverty in Egypt. He said: "When we talk about freedom, we also talk about ensuring human rights. For increasing poverty is proof of failure of human and economic development."

At the symposium held by the founders of the Wasat Party entitled 'The Relation between Poverty and Development', Fergani said: "The prevailing perception of the poor in our country is those whose income is less than US\$ 2 per day. Yet the Planning Minister came out one day to tell us that the minimum poverty line is LE 1.5 per day."

Fergani explained that according to the assessment by the International Monetary Fund of the minimum income of the poor being US\$ 2 per day, the minimum monthly income becomes LE 1650 for an average family of five. But 75% of Egyptian families get less than that.

He said: "Unemployment is linked to poverty, as work is the only source of income to the majority of Egyptians. And as unemployment for them means no income, this puts them not only under the poverty line, but in the 'no income' category."

He explained: "The broader concept of unemployment not finding a good job. This means a person has a job that is not commensurate with his talent and skill, a job with no decent working conditions, or a job that doesn't pay well."

Fergani talked of another definition of poverty, saying: "It is not being able to meet family needs. Here, earnings are eroded by rampant unemployment and inflation."

He criticized the low prices of durable goods, such as cars and TV sets, due to an abundance of Chinese products, pointing out that prices of basic commodities like food have risen by 100% in less than three months by the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2008, and that whatever the income, the ability to meet basic requirements will diminish in the face of an increase in prices of up to four or five times per year.

He said countries that seek justice do raise incomes at a rate that equals the rise in prices. And again he accused the government of lying about the inflation rate being 7-9%, saying: "Incomes are diminishing while the inflation rate is much higher than that. Wages must be reconsidered, as we often find income disparity within the same institution."

Fergani said the third definition of poverty relates to a decent life, explaining that in order for a person to be productive, he must be in good health. "According to the World Health Organization, health is not just the absence of disease, but that the body is optimally healthy, in addition to access to education. This fosters active participation, training and knowledge, which creates opportunities to employ such capabilities."

He said poverty is the antithesis of human development, which is why Egypt lacks a human capacity, especially among the women and the poor.

On the fourth definition of poverty, Fergani said: "It is the denial of political power and active participation. And as the capacity to fight poverty gets depleted in meeting basic needs, the decision-making process will remain in the hands of the few who dominate both wealth and rule."

Fergani pointed out that the closed doors of freedom and the absence of peaceful alternatives escalates protests, which may lead to two options: The first is some reconciliation of the political system epitomized in the peaceful substitute of the intellectual elite, which has not been the case historically in this society.

The other option is an escalating wave of protests against the government, which in her turn may confront it with stupidity and violence that would cause disaster.