



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

Egypt: Human Rights Seven Years After the Revolution

Wednesday, December 6, 2017

1:30 – 4:00 PM

2255 Rayburn House Office Building

Prepared Statement

Good afternoon. I join Co-Chair Hultgren in welcoming you to this Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing on human rights in Egypt. And I also extend my thanks to the witnesses for their long-standing commitment to human rights and for sharing their expertise with us today.

It has been just over two years since the Commission last held a hearing on human rights in Egypt. I wish I could say that things had improved in the interim, but that does not seem to be the case.

Two years ago we were concerned about the severe crackdown on political dissent and freedom of expression that had taken place in the aftermath of the military intervention that removed Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood from office and installed Abdel Fattah el Sisi.

Some 40,000 people had been detained, charged or sentenced due to their purported relationship with the Brotherhood. There were documented reports of unlawful killings, torture, suppression of civil liberties, and lack of due process. People had been forcibly disappeared; others were dying in prison; others were banned from travel. A record number of journalists were behind bars.

Today we will hear that these abuses continue, now routine and systematic – one of our witnesses will describe the “machinery of repression and the institutionalization of injustice.”

Since the beginning of 2015, another 26,000 people have been arrested.

One new element of the institutionalization, not fully implemented yet, is the NGO law ratified by el Sisi earlier this year. Law 70 of 2017 restricts foreign funding, criminalizes peaceful, legitimate civic activism and makes violations subject to criminal prosecution.

The situation today is described as worse than under former dictator Hosni Mubarek – conditions are more terrible than those that prompted the 2011 revolution in the first place.

We will also hear about the disproportionate impact of repression on certain communities:

- Coptic Christians, subject to institutionalized, daily, systematic discrimination punctuated by terrorist attacks against churches;
- The LGBT community, whose exercise of the fundamental freedom of expression has led to dozens of arrests and a very real threat of criminalization of homosexuality;
- The swelling prison population, severely overcrowded, where people are denied food, medicine, basic hygiene and reading materials. Many of those subject to these inhumane conditions are political prisoners.

In the end, so much of this is justified by the Egyptian regime using the discourse of anti-terrorism. Egypt is one of those countries where the so-called “war against terrorism” justifies everything.

There’s just one problem: it’s not working. A few days ago, more than 300 people were killed in a terrorist attack in a mosque in the Sinai peninsula. More than 40 were killed in attacks on Coptic churches on Palm Sunday last spring. Those responsible focus purposefully on civilians. Sectarian divides are deepening.

Much of the repression and humiliation the government inflicts is directed at young people. Their sense of injustice and desperation may make them particularly susceptible to recruitment by terrorist groups.

In short, things in Egypt are going in the wrong direction. We need to ask ourselves what role our own policies are playing, in a country that received some 20% of all U.S. foreign military financing during the current fiscal year.

Is our leverage really so limited? Or is it that we’re not using it?

I very much look forward to hearing your recommendations.

Thank you and I yield back.