



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing**

### **Egypt: Human Rights Seven Years After the Revolution**

**December 6, 2017**

**2:30 – 4:00 PM**

**2255 Rayburn House Office Building**

#### **Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery**

Good afternoon and welcome to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's hearing on Egypt: Human Rights Seven Years After the Revolution. I would like to thank our distinguished experts for taking the time out of their busy schedules and important work to come testify on this topic today.

In the Winter of 2011, the world watched with amazement and some nervousness as hundreds of thousands of Egyptians took to the streets to demand the universal rights they felt they had been denied. This massive, and largely non-violent display of protest led to the resignation of President Mubarak, and inspired hope amongst Egyptians and the international community for the kind of government that might arise in its aftermath. Almost seven years after the revolution, has the human rights situation improved in Egypt?

As Vice President Pence prepares to visit Egypt this month, we wish to better understand where Egypt stands on human rights issues and the related international commitments it has made. It is because Egypt is such a strong and longstanding ally that we believe these issues are so important.

Today's hearing will focus on three key areas of human rights in Egypt, including rule of law as it affects civil society, Coptic Christians and religious freedom, and prisoners of conscience and their prison conditions.

Earlier this year President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi ratified a new NGO law, Law 70 of 2017, that restricts civil society groups in Egypt from implementing developmental and charity programs outside of government control. The law requires NGOs to receive prior approval from internal security before accepting foreign funding. It also restricts the scope of permitted NGO activities and increases penalties for violations. Other laws have passed placing state control over media outlets, restricting the right to peaceful assembly and protest, and expanding the President's power to appoint members of top judicial bodies.

Egypt's Coptic Christians and other religious minorities continue to endure persecution, with several church closures in October alone. Violent terrorist attacks against church congregations continue to target and kill worshipers in the space where they should feel safest. In addition to the attacks against Coptic communities, I was very saddened to hear about the killing of over 300 Sufi Muslims in Egypt two weeks ago. This is a tragedy that no person or family should have to endure. Freedom of belief is a cornerstone human right that every individual and community is entitled to.

Lastly, the TLHRC has taken a special interest in the cases of prisoners of conscience around the world so the world does not forget about those who are having their most basic rights taken away. Thousands of prisoners languish in Egyptian prisons without charges, access to legal counsel, due process, or proper food and medical care.

Ola al-Qaradawi (AL-KARAH-DAHWE) and her husband Hossam Khalaf are U.S. legal permanent residents with eight American citizen family members. Ola and Hosam have been held for over 150 days in incommunicado solitary confinement in violation of Egyptian and international law. They have been denied all access to family or legal counsel and are held in windowless cells 24 hours a day with only a five-minute bathroom break daily. They have been denied regular access to the canteen, resulting in serious weight loss for both of them from the inedible food. While the state-run media claims they have been charged with crimes, their lawyer has been given no information in writing of any kind, and the Egyptian government has declined repeated requests to address these grave violations.

Another similar example is Mahmoud Hussein, an Egyptian journalist who was arrested in December 2016. He has been in prison now for a year, spending his first 100 days in solitary confinement. To date, he has still not seen a judge or been able to determine the charges against him. Pre-trial detentions like Mahmoud's are renewed every 45 days. Meanwhile, the prisoner suffers under inhumane conditions without access to due process.

We recognize Egypt is facing very difficult security threats from dangerous terrorist organizations and armed groups, but we encourage the government to combat these threats within the framework of human rights and their commitments to international law.

I look forward to hearing an update on these different aspects of the human rights situation in Egypt, and on how the United States government can better partner with the Egyptian government on these issues.

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