



Human Rights in Egypt

**Tuesday, November 3rd, 2015
1:30 – 3:30 PM**

Opening Statement:

The Commission will come to order –

The Co-Chairman will recognize himself for an opening statement.

I'd like to thank my distinguish Co-Chair, Mr. McGovern, and the distinguished Executive Committee Member, Mr. Ellison, for collaborating on this important hearing on the human rights climate in Egypt.

Congressman Ellison first requested that we hold this hearing, noting that there had not been a Congressional hearing focused exclusively on Egypt's human rights situation since the 2013 popular demonstrations that brought an end to the Morsi government.

Nearly five years ago, this Commission held such a hearing, in January of 2011. We did not know at the time – nor could anyone have known – the dramatic events and the radical changes that took place just weeks afterwards. The popular revolutions of the Arab Spring, with its start in Tunisia, quickly spread across North Africa and the Near East, forcing longtime President and American ally Hosni Mubarak from power.

However, the revolutions' messages of reform, democracy and anti-corruption were quickly drowned out by competing movements.

Egyptians, after a series of elections and constitutions, narrowly elected Mohamad Morsi in June of 2012.

International human rights observers noted human rights abuses under President Morsi, including torture by security officials, a stifling of expression and a climate of impunity for both security personnel and radical non-state actors.

Consequently, a string of massive, popular protests against the Morsi government lead to the eventual removal of the President in July of 2013. Notably, it was then Defense Minister Al-Sisi who issued the announcement transitioning power to an interim, civilian President.

However, the ensuing transition of power to eventually elected President Al-Sisi has followed as much – if not more – criticism for its human rights record.

Observers note severe crackdowns on dissent, association, expression, and other civil liberties. Furthermore, the current government has been criticized for the enforcement of laws restricting the freedom of religion. Security forces have been accused of torture and other direct violations of human rights.

In what is perhaps the most severe trend noted by observers, the current government has used a tenuous security situation as a pretext to oppress and stifle political opposition.

As this situation unfolds in Cairo, Egypt faces another threat to its human rights climate – that of terrorist organizations and their constant campaign to deprave human beings of their lives.

The Sinai Province of the Islamic State wages an insurgency in the Northern Sinai against Egypt's military. Other fighters have returned from Syria and Iraq and hope to return Egypt to Islamic rule.

Other terrorists have been radicalized internally by Islamist groups that have long operated within the country.

Terrorists groups obviously threaten the human rights climate in Egypt, but also represent an existential threat to Egypt's government and its citizens.

I believe this hearing will offer an opportunity for change in the current state of affairs in Egypt.

The U.S. interests of promoting democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights does not conflict with our interest in combating terror and mutually providing for a robust security. To the contrary – they are very much in line.

I have been encouraged by some of the actions of the current government. President Al-Sisi's historic visit to St. Marc's Cathedral and his calls for unity should not go unnoticed. Similarly, his reflection point on the need for a "revolution" in Islam is courageous. The new government's confrontation of corruption and promoting economic liberty is also essential to meeting Egypt's challenges.

However, these actions do not atone for the list of restrictions on freedoms, destruction of liberties and repressive policies that seem to be growing from within Cairo.

I look forward to the testimony from our panelists here today and hope we can explore sound solutions for these substantial challenges.

With that, I yield to my distinguished Co-Chair, Congressman McGovern.