

350 Fifth Avenue, 34<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10118-3299  
Tel: +1-212-290-4700  
Fax: +1-212-736-1300; 917-591-3452

July 30, 2015

The Honorable John F. Kerry  
Secretary of State  
United States Department of State  
Harry S. Truman Building  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Re: US-Egypt Strategic Dialogue

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We understand you will soon head to Cairo for the upcoming US-Egypt Strategic Dialogue, where we strongly urge you to make political reform, human rights, and fundamental freedoms a central part of the agenda. Without more robust attention, we are concerned that the deteriorating human rights situation in Egypt will reinforce the country's dangerous path and make it increasingly difficult for the US to effectively cooperate with the Egyptians on a wide range of issues.

In addition, we are worried that the recent decision to fully resume military aid appears to be an endorsement of Egypt's policy of muzzling independent voices and squeezing political space. With this in mind, we wanted to take this opportunity to provide you with a brief update from our research. We are highlighting several key issues we believe need to be on the official agenda while also making clear, privately and publicly, that the US wants to see Egypt's current trajectory reversed.

In particular, we are concerned about the many people detained for exercising their rights to free expression and association, including those imprisoned solely for taking part in peaceful protests or belonging to political groups. At present, thousands of people have been caught up in the government's crackdown that began in 2013 and remain detained without trial, while others have been convicted without due process or after unfair trials. As you know, the range of detainees is wide – from Khaled al-Qazzaz, a senior advisor to former President Mohamed Morsy who, though released from prison without charge, still cannot leave the country, to Yara Sallam, a lawyer and human rights defender who is serving a two-year prison sentence for allegedly participating in a peaceful demonstration. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 18 journalists were jailed as of June 1, 2015, including Mahmoud Abou Zeid, also known as Shawkan, a photojournalist arrested on August 14, 2013, who has been held without charge in pretrial detention for nearly two years.

HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
WATCH

HRW.org

Kenneth Roth, *Executive Director*

**DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS**

Michele Alexander, *Development and Global Initiatives*  
Carroll Bogert, *External Relations*  
Iain Levine, *Program*  
Chuck Lustig, *Operations*  
Bruno Stagno Ugarte, *Advocacy*

Emma Daly, *Communications Director*  
Peggy Hicks, *Global Advocacy Director*  
Dinah PoKempner, *General Counsel*  
James Ross, *Legal and Policy Director*

**DIVISION AND PROGRAM DIRECTORS**

Brad Adams, *Asia*  
Daniel Bekele, *Africa*  
Alison Parker, *United States*  
José Miguel Vivanco, *Americas*  
Sarah Leah Whitson, *Middle East and North Africa*  
Hugh Williamson, *Europe and Central Asia*

Joseph Amon, *Health and Human Rights*  
Shantha Rau Barriga, *Disability Rights*  
Peter Bouckaert, *Emergencies*  
Zama Coursen-Neff, *Children's Rights*  
Richard Dicker, *International Justice*  
Bill Frelick, *Refugees' Rights*  
Arvind Ganesan, *Business and Human Rights*  
Liesel Gerholtz, *Women's Rights*  
Steve Goose, *Arms*  
Graeme Reid, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights*

**ADVOCACY DIRECTORS**

Philippe Bolopion, *Crisis Advocacy and United Nations, NY*  
Maria Laura Canineu, *Brazil*  
Kanae Doi, *Japan*  
Jean-Marie Fardeau, *France*  
John Fisher, *United Nations, Geneva*  
Meenakshi Ganguly, *South Asia*  
Lotte Leicht, *European Union*  
Sarah Margon, *Washington DC*  
David Mepham, *United Kingdom*  
Wenzel Michalski, *Germany*  
Elaine Pearson, *Australia*

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Hassan Elmasry, *Co-Chair*  
Joel Motley, *Co-Chair*  
Wendy Keys, *Vice-Chair*  
Susan Manilow, *Vice-Chair*  
Jean-Louis Servan-Schreiber, *Vice-Chair*  
Sid Sheinberg, *Vice-Chair*  
John J. Studzinski, *Vice-Chair*  
Michael G. Fisch, *Treasurer*  
Bruce Rabb, *Secretary*  
Karen Ackman  
Jorge Castañeda  
Tony Elliott  
Michael E. Gellert  
Hina Jilani  
Betsy Karel  
Robert Kissane  
David Lakhdir  
Kimberly Marteau Emerson  
Oki Matsumoto  
Barry Meyer  
Joan R. Platt  
Amy Rao  
Neil Rimer  
Victoria Riskin  
Graham Robeson  
Shelley Rubin  
Kevin P. Ryan  
Ambassador Robin Sanders  
Javier Solana  
Siri Stolt-Nielsen  
Darian W. Swig  
Makoto Takano  
John R. Taylor  
Amy Towers  
Peter Visser  
Marie Warburg  
Catherine Zennström

We urge you to press for al-Qazzaz to be able to leave the country with his family and for Sallam to be released.

As you know, Egyptians are enduring more serious human rights violations than before the 2011 uprising and a political crackdown that rivals any in their modern history. There is every indication that al-Sisi's approach to addressing insecurity and instability is making the situation only worse. In the Sinai Peninsula, a serious insurgency and harsh counter-terrorism response may have claimed thousands of lives, while attacks on security forces in mainland Egypt continue unabated. In fact, closing off avenues for peaceful dissent and allowing near complete impunity for security forces could fuel greater radicalization – not lessen it.

Specifically, we note the following issues:

- Egyptian authorities arrested, indicted or sentenced at least 41,000 people following al-Sisi's removal of President Morsy in July 2013. The government has never provided a full and transparent accounting of this arrest campaign. In response to inquiries from a fact-finding committee in July 2014, the Interior Ministry admitted that nearly 7,400 people arrested in the wake of Morsy's overthrow remained in pre-trial detention. Many were arrested only for protesting or for alleged links to the Muslim Brotherhood, the nearly century-old Islamist movement that the government banned and labeled a terrorist organization. Authorities house many detainees in police stations, camps, and military bases, where torture, overcrowding and inadequate medical treatment have led to rising deaths. At least 124 Egyptians have died in the custody of the security forces since August 2013, according to independent Egyptian groups.
- The government has made it nearly impossible for independent civil society groups to function. In September 2014, al-Sisi issued a law providing for life imprisonment for anyone who receives foreign funding – the major source of many key nongovernmental organization (NGO) budgets – for the undefined purpose of harming Egypt's "national interest" or "unity." The government has moved for the first time to force all NGOs to register under a 2002 law that gives the authorities power to dissolve them and veto their funding and board membership. An investigating judge has restarted a case looking into local NGOs' foreign funding and has dispatched investigators to inquire about their budgets and registration documents. Several leading NGOs have either relocated their operations abroad or halted important programs.
- Al-Sisi issued a law in October 2014 allowing military courts to try civilians for crimes that take place on state and public property, and around 3,000 people have since been referred for prosecution. The government also created special national security courts to try terrorism cases, courts which have handed down mass sentences against Muslim Brotherhood leaders and protesters. Since Morsy's removal, courts have sentenced at least 670 people to death in political cases, though Egypt's highest appeals court has ordered

retrials for many of these. In February, a court sentenced 230 people, including leading liberal activist Ahmed Douma, to life in prison for a 2011 protest. Another court is currently hearing the case of 494 people arrested in August 2013, during the unrest that followed Morsy's removal, who are collectively charged with the murder of one man, damage to a police station, and other crimes.

We strongly believe Egypt's current repressive approach, which it claims is intended to address security threats, is deeply counterproductive and that stability will remain elusive unless there is significant political reform that adheres to the principles of basic rights. We hope you will take these developments into account as you prepare for meetings in Cairo.

Many thanks in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'S Margon', written in dark ink on a light background.

Sarah Margon  
Washington Director