



human rights *first*

American ideals. Universal values.

November 3, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary of State
U. S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Tillerson:

I am writing to urge you to condemn publicly and unequivocally the Egyptian government's recent campaign of persecution against the country's LGBT community.

Since mid-September, the Egyptian government has detained more than 65 people, most of them gay men, for exercising their right of free expression through actions such as waving a rainbow flag. Authorities have charged dozens of people with offenses like "spreading debauchery" or "promoting sexual deviancy" and has subjected some to so-called "anal examinations," a form of torture.

This campaign against LGBT people is part of a concerted effort to paint legitimate criticism of Egypt's dismal human rights record—by the U.S. and other governments, inter-governmental organizations, and human rights organizations—as an effort to promote immorality. The Egyptian government is using this campaign to create an atmosphere of contrived moral panic that it will manipulate to enact further measures to attack and discredit human rights groups and activists.

In order to excite popular outrage against LGBT people, Egyptian authorities have in recent months portrayed homosexuality as a mortal threat to the state, enlisting the support of Muslim and Christian religious leaders in their effort. The country's Supreme Council of Media Regulation has banned any media coverage supportive of homosexuality, while Egyptian security services have portrayed LGBT rights as a foreign-funded plot meant to undermine public conduct and morals. The Egyptian Minister of Justice has, meanwhile, restored the Court of Values and Morals, a judicial body used extensively by President Sadat to jail his non-violent critics on vaguely worded offenses. Finally, last week, Egyptian members of parliament introduced a new law criminalizing same sex relations and public support of LGBT rights.

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This campaign should be seen for what it is—an escalation of policies to which you have rightly signaled your opposition. We welcomed your decision in August to deny and withhold hundreds of millions of dollars in military assistance to Egypt in consideration of the Egyptian government’s assault on independent civil society organizations. While the State Department deserves credit for expressing concern over the Egyptian government’s most recent actions, the U.S. government should now condemn these human rights violations plainly and categorically.

I urge you to communicate to the Egyptian government that the persecution of the LGBT community is only heightening U.S. government concerns about the suppression of basic freedoms for all Egyptians, and that the continuation of these attacks will not only make it impossible to release military assistance currently withheld, but will also place future military assistance at risk. Any such statement should include a call for the immediate release of all of those detained on charges related to supporting homosexuality and an end to the vilification of LGBT people in the state-controlled media.

President Sisi’s repressive policies continue to fuel instability, which harms U.S. interests in Egypt and the broader region. Condemning the crackdown on the LGBT community, and indicating that you see through the Egyptian government’s efforts to create a scapegoat to justify further repression, would give additional weight to your efforts to urge the Sisi government to restore respect for basic rights and freedoms for all Egyptians. A clear position against this crackdown would give valuable support to a vulnerable group subjected to cruel and arbitrary repression, and would also demonstrate U.S. support for universal values as an indispensable element of our relationship with an important regional partner.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elisa Massimino". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elisa Massimino
President and CEO