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AND CONSUMER CREDIT

April 15, 2015

The Honorable James P. McGovern
Co-Chairman, Tom Lantos Human
Rights Commission
438 Cannon HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Joseph R. Pitts
Co-Chairman, Tom Lantos Human
Rights Commission
420 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Chairmen McGovern and Pitts:

I write to request a hearing on human rights abuses in Egypt. While there are many areas of the world that require the attention of the Lantos Commission, reports of alarming abuses indicate that few are as urgent and crucial as the case of Egypt.

Following the removal of President Morsi, thousands of Egyptian citizens, including politicians, judges, and other civil servants, have reportedly been detained for political dissent. President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's government has been accused of engaging in violent oppression. A hearing would be beneficial to accurately inform U.S. policy.

On December 10th, 2013, Congressman Chris Smith, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations held a hearing on human rights abuses in Egypt. The hearing documented the rise of extrajudicial killings and unlawful detentions of protesters and journalists critical of the Morsi administration. This hearing took place prior to the overthrow of the Morsi administration, and no congressional hearing has been held on human rights in Egypt since.

Since President el-Sisi took office in June 2014, human rights groups allege that freedom of the press in Egypt has been further dismantled, and the basic human rights of Egyptian citizen may be at risk. These abuses continue to be documented by Human Rights Watch, the U.N. Human Rights Commission Periodic Review, Amnesty International, and human rights organizations in Egypt.

The State Department Human Rights Report for 2013 details an array of human rights abuses that include: arbitrary and unlawful killings by police, security forces, and other government agents; enforced and involuntary disappearances which the government has made no attempt to prevent or investigate; widespread instances of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment; religious oppression including the persecution of Coptic Christians; unlawful and arbitrary arrest and detention, and denial of fair public trials. These abuses of human rights come alongside suppression of the press and detention of journalists, particularly those covering politics or human rights.

In February 2015, Human Rights Watch issued a statement urging Egyptian officials to investigate allegations of torture of an economics professor and his brother. Efforts to investigate the incident have been reportedly dismissed by the prosecutor. According to Human Rights Watch:

“Many similar incidents of abuse in custody have been reported in the past two years, according to a January 2015 report by the United Group, an independent Egyptian human rights law firm. The report, which covered October 2013 to August 2014, said that United Group lawyers had interviewed 465 alleged victims of police torture and ill treatment and had filed 163 complaints to prosecutors, of which only seven reached the courts. Of the other cases, 69 remain under investigation and 87 were rejected by prosecutors, the report said.”

A hearing on Egypt’s human rights abuses is timely and relevant to inform U.S. policy-making. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to working with the Lantos Commission to improve human rights in Egypt.

Sincerely,



Keith Ellison
Member of Congress