

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 12, 2016

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
US Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to express our deepest concern regarding the ongoing and unprecedented crackdown on independent civil society in Egypt. We appreciate your strong statement of concern about this situation on March 18 and urge you to continue to press Egyptian officials to end the campaign of harassment that threatens to close down vital organizations promoting basic human rights and freedoms protected by the Egyptian Constitution.

Current investigations into human rights groups under the so-called ‘foreign funding case’ no. 173, travel bans and asset freezes targeting human rights defenders and their families, and a media gag order imposed in mid-March reporting any of these measures, could well lead to the forced closure of longstanding and well-regarded Egyptian human rights organizations such as the Cairo Institute for Human Rights, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, the Nadeem Center for Victims of Torture and Violence, and Nazra Center for Feminist Studies. As you are aware, attacks on Egyptian and international civil society groups— particularly those engaged in human rights work—that receive funding from sources outside the country have been commonplace since 2011, following the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak. Amendments since then to the criminal code provide for extremely harsh penalties for those charged with accepting funding for work deemed ‘not in the national interest’ or at organizations not registered under the country’s draconian and intrusive NGO law. Over the last month, the Egyptian authorities have made clear that they intend to pursue charges against every leading human rights organization in Egypt in an apparent attempt to silence all internal critics.

On March 19, a Cairo criminal court proposed to freeze the assets of Hossam Bahgat, journalist and founder of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, Gamal Eid, lawyer and director of the Arab Network for Human Rights Information, as well as the assets of Eid’s wife and eleven-year-old daughter. The judges investigating the case also imposed a gag rule prohibiting media coverage of the proceedings. Then, on March 22, Mozn Hassan, the executive director of Nazra Center for Feminist Studies, and three of her colleagues were summoned for questioning as a defendant in the foreign funding case.

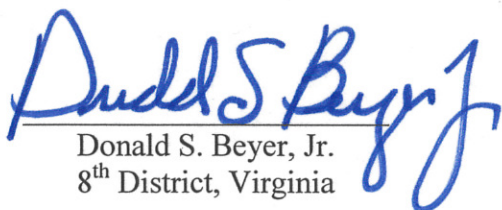
The campaign against Egypt’s human rights defenders has only intensified this spring. Egyptian authorities are acting in disregard of their own laws as well as their obligations under international human rights protections. Further, as you have recognized, repressing civil society leads to greater, not less, instability and insecurity. It is essential that the State Department, on behalf of the U.S. government, press the government of Egypt to take specific actions to combat the restrictions and crackdown on non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

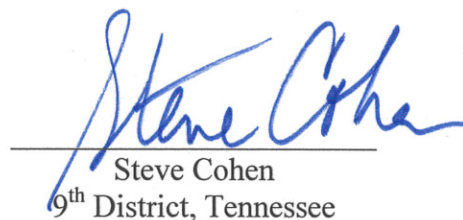
To this end, we urge the State Department to use its considerable leverage to press the Egyptian government to:

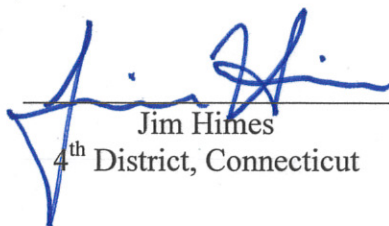
- halt the ongoing investigation of independent human rights organizations in relation to the legitimate exercise of their activities and close the “foreign funding” case once and for all;
- grant NGOs a grace period of one year to register under a new associations law that would comply with Article 75 of the Egyptian Constitution, which allows groups to be recognized and funded by notification, and invite NGO participation in consultations on the drafting of this new associations law;
- withdraw the administrative decision to close down the Nadeem Center for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture and Violence;
- lift travel bans and asset freezes that were arbitrarily ordered against human rights defenders;
- issue a presidential decree pardoning all Egyptian and foreign NGO staff convicted in the 2012 foreign funding case, and
- comply with the pledges made when accepting Egypt’s UPR recommendations in March 2015 at the UN Human Rights Council, and cease the harassment and prosecution of civil society organizations, women’s rights defenders and human rights defenders.

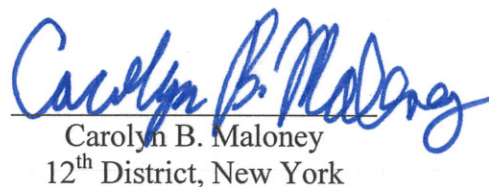
Once again, we emphasize the urgency of this matter, and we thank you for your continued leadership in urging the Egyptian government to change course.

Sincerely,

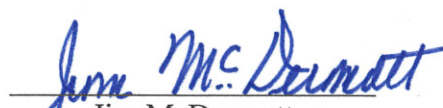

Donald S. Beyer, Jr.
8th District, Virginia

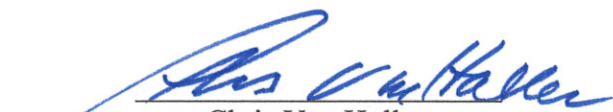

Steve Cohen
9th District, Tennessee

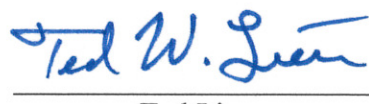

Jim Himes
4th District, Connecticut


Carolyn B. Maloney
12th District, New York



Betty McCollum
4th District, Minnesota



Jim McDermott
7th District, Washington

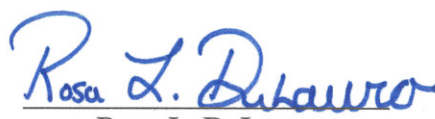

Chris Van Hollen
8th District, Maryland

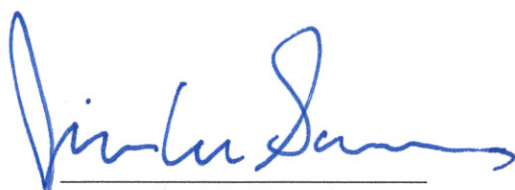

Ted Lieu
33rd District, California


Mark DeSaulnier
11th District, California



David Cicilline
1st District, Rhode Island

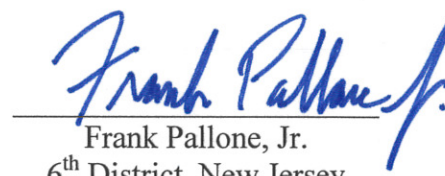

Loretta Sanchez
46th District, California


Rosa L. DeLauro
3rd District, Connecticut


Jim McGovern
2nd District, Massachusetts



Lloyd Doggett
35th District, Texas


Derek Kilmer
6th District, Washington


Frank Pallone, Jr.
6th District, New Jersey



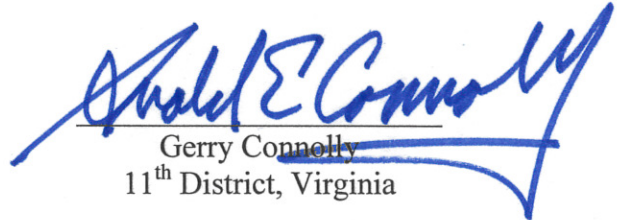
Seth Moulton
6th District, Massachusetts



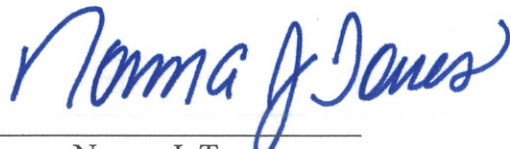
Mike Honda
17th District, California



Adam Schiff
28th District, California



Gerry Connolly
11th District, Virginia



Norma J. Torres
35th District, California



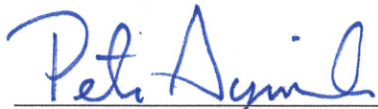
Keith Ellison
5th District, Minnesota



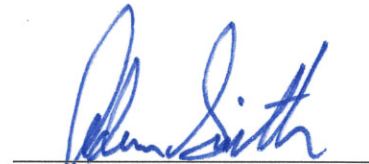
Zoe Lofgren
19th District, California




Mark Pocan
2nd District, Wisconsin



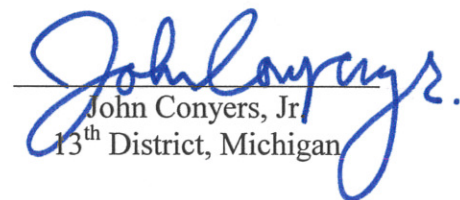
Pete Aguilar
31st District, California



Adam Smith
9th District, Washington



Alan Lowenthal
47th District, California



John Conyers, Jr.
13th District, Michigan