



American ideals. Universal values.

December 18, 2017

The Honorable Mike Pence
The White House
Office of the Vice President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Pence:

The Trump administration's decision in August to deny and withhold hundreds of millions of dollars in military assistance to Egypt because of the Egyptian government's assault on independent civil society organizations was a wise response to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's relentless repression of nonviolent political opposition.

When you meet with President Sisi on December 20, I urge you to make clear that the United States government remains deeply concerned about deteriorating human rights conditions in Egypt that fuel instability and risk undermining the ability of the United States to continue to productively partner with Egypt on a shared counter-terrorism agenda.

When you announced your visit to the Middle East in a speech in Washington in October, you pledged that you would take the opportunity of the trip to call for an end to the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities in the region. Your attention to this issue is welcome: Christians and other religious minorities in Egypt have been particular targets of terrorist violence in recent years. Unfortunately, President Sisi's response to these attacks—a State of Emergency that furthers policies of repression and denies basic freedoms—has proven to be counterproductive.

In Egypt, you should urge President Sisi to adopt effective, comprehensive strategies for combating the threat of terrorism. These must go beyond a narrow reliance on the use of state force and recognize that repression and human rights violations enflame the grievances that violent extremists exploit. You should emphasize the importance of protecting the rights of non-violent dissent and criticism of government policy and stress the vital role of independent civil society organizations.

Egypt's problems with terrorist attacks directed against the Christian community have additional specific causes. ISIS has identified Egypt's vulnerability to sectarian dissension and has targeted Christians to exacerbate sectarian tensions. Egypt is vulnerable to these kinds of attacks because for decades it has allowed institutional, state backed discrimination against Christians—such as the restrictions on the construction and repair of churches and other religious buildings, impunity for perpetrators of anti-Christian violence, and the enforcement of blasphemy laws that have a

discriminatory impact on Christians and other religious minorities. I urge you to press the Sisi government to end these discriminatory, anti-Christian practices.

Egyptian public discourse has become increasingly sectarian over recent years. The Egyptian government could play a much more vigorous role in pushing back against incitement and hate-speech. President Sisi, as well as the state-backed television and mass circulation media, should publicly counter inflammatory provocation, which paves the way for violent attacks.

Furthermore, the Egyptian government is using a campaign of persecution against another minority population—the LGBT community—to create an atmosphere of contrived moral panic that it is exploiting to enact further measures to restrict peaceful dissent and freedom of expression and to further attack and discredit human rights groups and activists. 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.

I urge you to condemn the continuation and escalation—including efforts to pass a new law criminalizing homosexuality—of these attacks. I also urge you to 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. 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.

Without a fundamental change in the Sisi government's policies, there will be no sustainable security. Religious minorities and other vulnerable groups will continue to suffer violence and injustice. In such circumstances, Egypt cannot be an effective partner for the United States in the global struggle against terrorism. Repression is not strength. It is vital that all the leaders the administration has engaged in its counterterrorism agenda understand that the exhortation to fight terrorism is not an invitation to double down on repression.

I hope that you will convey this important message to President Sisi.

Sincerely,



Elisa Massimino
President and CEO