



November 3, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary of State
2201 C Street Northwest
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Last week, it was reported that the Egyptian parliament is considering legislation that would criminalize a broad array of acts by LGBTQ Egyptians and their allies. This follows weeks of alarming crackdowns which have targeted Egypt's LGBTQ community and have reportedly led to over 60 arrests. As president of the Human Rights Campaign, the world's largest LGBTQ advocacy organization, I urge you speak out about this persecution quickly and with a commitment to holding the Egyptian government accountable.

The most recent wave of anti-LGBTQ persecution began in September, when authorities in Cairo arrested seven people who had been photographed at a concert raising a rainbow flag. These arrests marked the beginning of an unprecedented and widespread crackdown on LGBTQ Egyptians -- some being beaten and subjected to invasive physical exams. Within one week, the Egyptian government banned the media from showing any kind of support for the LGBTQ community, further curtailing freedom of expression. Perhaps as a result, Egyptian media under the thumb of the government have largely backed the crackdown, publishing articles encouraging Egyptians to target LGBTQ people with hate speech and hate crimes.

Even more concerning are reports that the Egyptian parliament will consider legislation that would criminalize sexual relations between people of the same sex with imprisonment of at least one year. The legislation even criminalizes anyone carrying a symbol or sign that demonstrates support of the community with the same mandatory sentence of at least one year. Advocates attempting to fight the legislation face enormous legal obstacles in organizing, making a strong condemnation from the U.S. and other international actors all the more crucial.

In addition to addressing the state-sponsored persecution underway in Egypt, we urge you to speak out more broadly against the onslaught of state-sponsored persecution of LGBTQ people in Chechnya, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Georgia, Tanzania, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan.

Since April, we have heard continuing reports that the government of **Chechnya** had been arresting, detaining and torturing as many as 200 LGBTQ people in secret prisons and that up to 20 people may have been murdered.

In May, authorities in **Bangladesh** arrested 28 men at a private social gathering and publicly outed them. Bangladeshi media then repeatedly showed videos and pictures of those arrested, further jeopardizing their lives.

That same month in **Indonesia**, police arrested 141 allegedly gay men, releasing their photographs and endangering their lives. This was followed by a public caning of two men accused of homosexuality, in front of a jeering crowd of thousands. On October 6, Indonesian authorities made further arrests of more than 50 people, also on “pornography” charges.

In **Georgia**, two gay men were attacked and beaten by a mob in Batumi in late August. When the men sought help from the police, the police joined in the abuse, shouting homophobic slurs at them while beating and arresting them.

In **Tanzania**, 20 people were arrested in Zanzibar at an education program on HIV/AIDS in September. Others were arrested at an October meeting with their lawyers, and bail was revoked -- a severe attack on human rights.

Also in September, it was reported that authorities in **Azerbaijan** were cracking down on LGBTQ people, arresting at least 60 people while beating, harassing and torturing many of them.

And in October, reports began to emerge from **Tajikistan** that the government may have a registry of “proven” gays and lesbians, under an operation they are calling “morality” and “purge.”

The U.S. response to this wave of anti-LGBTQ violence has been far too weak. While there have been important statements from Ambassador Haley, State Department spokesman Heather Nauert and a few other U.S. ambassadors, and while State Department staff continue to support civil society organizations and individuals under threat, it has not been nearly enough to focus international attention and create pressure to stop the surge in anti-LGBTQ violence.

We urge you to personally speak out. Doing so will save lives. When you are silent, the perpetrators of this violence see America not as a moral leader -- but as a government that will look the other way. In addition, we ask you to demonstrate America’s commitment to human rights by increasing U.S. funding for LGBTQ civil society groups around the world and making it clear to the American people, the international community and State Department staff that supporting and protecting the human rights of LGBTQ people remains a State Department commitment and priority.

The United States has long been a beacon of hope for oppressed people around the globe, and we are at our strongest when we affirm the values we hold dear before the rest of the world. On the global stage that means championing the dignity of all individuals, no matter how vulnerable or disenfranchised. I urge you to speak out against the serious attacks on LGBTQ people around the world by loudly condemning these arbitrary arrests, detentions, and persecution of LGBTQ people. There are countless lives -- in these countries and many others across the globe -- depending on America's action and leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chad Griffin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chad Griffin
HRC President

Cc: Gen. H.R. McMaster, National Security Advisor
Dina Powell, Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategy