



[Over 50 U.S. Lawmakers Pen a Letter Calling for Egyptian Leader el-Sisi's Regime to Release Political Prisoners](#)

Earlier this week, a group of more than 50 U.S. lawmakers penned a bicameral letter urging Egyptian leader el-Sisi's regime to release human rights activists, journalists, and other political prisoners. The letter was spearheaded by Senator Sherrod Brown and Representatives Ro Khanna and Jim McGovern, and was also signed by Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. In it, the signatories condemned the unjust imprisonments and expressed concern for the deplorable conditions under which the detainees are being held, particularly during the midst of the ongoing global health pandemic. They also emphasized the importance of respect for human rights to the U.S.-Egyptian partnership. The Egyptian government under el-Sisi has engaged in a brutal crackdown on dissent and been criticized for its alarming level of human rights abuses. Groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have lamented the current regime's repressive measures, and estimate that there are approximately 60,000 political prisoners in Egypt which include journalists, dissidents, government rivals, lawyers, and activists.

Since coming to power in 2013, el-Sisi's regime has worked to enact policies which criminalize the basic freedoms of Egyptian citizens. As a result, thousands have been unjustly imprisoned in recent years and subjected to torture as a means of coercion. Due to the increasingly higher number of detainees, the security facility system has also had trouble accommodating this mass influx of people, leading to ever-worsening living conditions for those in captivity. This issue has become especially problematic now because of the global health crisis, whereby COVID-19 outbreaks can have a devastating effect on the safety of prisoners.

For this reason, the congressional authors of the letter to el-Sisi have grown further disturbed with the unlawful detentions in the current health climate and are therefore urging him to release political prisoners. Representative Khanna expressed outrage regarding the fact that "even in the middle of a global pandemic, el-Sisi continues to lock up citizens in notoriously overcrowded and dangerous prisons" and stressed that he "must release human rights activists, lawyers, and other prisoners of conscience before they face a COVID-19 death sentence behind bars." Khanna and the other leaders of the effort to pressure el-Sisi noted that there is increasing frustration across both chambers of Congress with his blatant human rights violations, and that the message is an embodiment of that sentiment. In addition to political actors, the document was also endorsed by rights groups including Amnesty International USA, Human Rights Watch, and The Freedom Initiative.

The letter comes at a time when the United States is merely two weeks away from an upcoming election, and some have highlighted its importance as a tone-setter for the future of U.S.-Egyptian relations. Celine Lebrun, for example, whose husband remains imprisoned by Egyptian authorities, believes the letter will help mobilize members of Congress on the issue and sends a strong message to the el-Sisi regime that a potential Democratic presidential administration and Congress will not be silent regarding the continuing human rights abuses taking place in Egypt. Incumbent U.S. President Trump has repeatedly declined to publicly pressure el-Sisi despite growing condemnation about his administration's repressive activities. On the contrary, Trump has praised the leader as his "favorite dictator" and stated that he is "not concerned" with the mass protests in Egypt against his rule – which have been met by security forces with heavy levels of violence and suppression. However, analysts contend that a new U.S. administration could take a more critical approach towards el-Sisi's behavior and policies.

In one of the latest developments this week, European lawmakers joined their American counterparts in calling for the release of Egyptian political prisoners. Over 220 officials from several countries in Europe including France, Belgium, Germany, and Italy published a similar letter to the one penned by the group of U.S. legislators. Experts have praised the coordinated pressure as a positive development, but emphasize that concrete actions are needed to help supplement them.