



January 12, 2011

Statement from the Board of Trustees of Freedom House Regarding Egypt

In response to the recent raids by Egyptian authorities on Freedom House's Cairo office and those of several other NGOs (domestic and international), as well as the broader crackdown on civil society in Egypt, Freedom House today issued the following statement, signed by the Trustees listed below.

Freedom House was created in 1941 by Eleanor Roosevelt, Wendell Willkie and other leading American figures to be a voice for democracy and freedom in the world.

Through great commitment and sacrifice, the Egyptian people are seeking to chart a new course that ensures rule of law, transparency and observance of human rights. In other words, they are building a society based on democratic accountability rather than authoritarian coercion.

Civil society is the keystone of a democratic system. Nongovernmental organizations, human rights activists, independent journalists and bloggers all play a crucial role in helping Egypt move toward a more democratic society, as do ordinary citizens who wish to exercise their fundamental rights of expression and association.

The authorities' crackdown on civil society through attacks on these rights and freedoms therefore constitutes a direct threat to the Egyptian people's hopes for a more just, transparent, and representative political system.

This year's uprisings in Egypt, as well as Tunisia, Libya, Syria, and elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa, have revealed the limits of the region's prevailing governance systems. Popular pressure for change has resulted from decades of stifled dissent and blocked reforms.

The recent raids on NGOs in Egypt, part of a broader campaign against civil society, sounded the alarm for all of those who wish to see a more open and democratic outcome for this pivotal country.

Translating aspirations for reform into meaningful institutional change will be a complex and long-term effort. We know this from the experiences of, among others, post-authoritarian countries in East-Central Europe and Eurasia. We also know that civil society is crucial for achieving durable reforms. Building critical civil institutions, legal systems and a culture of

tolerance – all of which were suppressed in Egypt during the Mubarak era – will not be achieved by smothering civil society.

Given the stakes in the Middle East and North Africa, the unprecedented opportunity for moving in the direction of democracy and human rights in the region, and Egypt’s crucial role as a regional bellwether, standing by and permitting the smothering of civil society in Egypt is not an option.

Therefore, we call on the United States Government and those of other democracies to insist that the Egyptian authorities safeguard the rights and well-being of all civil society in Egypt.

We also call on the Egyptian authorities to allow the free and unfettered operation of local and international NGOs in Egypt as they work to expand respect for human rights and help the Egyptian people in their efforts to form a more just, open and democratic political system; to permit the re-opening of all offices of non-governmental organizations – Egyptian and international – closed in the recent raids and to return confiscated property; and to cease the state media campaign against civil society.

Signed,

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