

16 June, 2018

His Excellency Abdel Fattah el Sisi,
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
Office of the President
Al Ittihadia Palace
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt

Dear President Sisi,

We write to you as a global network of parliamentarians from diverse political, religious, and geographical backgrounds, committed to the promotion and protection of the freedom of religion or belief for all. We write to you to respectfully express our concern about the worrying pattern that has emerged of the widespread and systematic targeting of atheists by both state and non-state actors.

In recent years, international reports continue to highlight the unlawful harassment of atheists within Egyptian society, including situations where atheists are repeatedly maligned by media and government officials. In 2014, the government announced a national plan to confront and eliminate atheism, while many officials have described atheism as one of the biggest threats facing Egypt. On December 24th, 2017, a bill to ban atheism was proposed by Amro Hamroush, Head of the Parliaments Committee on Religion Affairs. The purpose of the bill was to curb what Mr. Hamroush called, "the phenomenon of atheism in Egyptian society". Although we welcome the shelving of the proposed bill, the list of events outlined above, represent a worrying pattern of hostility and contempt within Egyptian society towards atheists. It is because of such conditions that Human Rights Watch have indicated that atheists are one of Egypt's least protected minorities.

In addition to growing societal harassment and government-sponsored initiatives aimed at combating atheism, atheists have also become subject to blasphemy laws. Reports indicate that the increase in blasphemy cases against atheists have made atheists afraid to openly acknowledge their life-stance for fear of persecution. Although article 64 of the Egyptian constitution states that the freedom of belief is absolute, article 98 (f) of the Egyptian penal code prohibits blasphemy and contempt of religion. These poorly defined laws are open for interpretations that have been used to criminalize the freedom of thought, the right to have doubts about religious teachings, to express them publicly and to share them with others. A recent example of the use of article 98 (f) included the arrest of 29-year-old atheist Ibrahim Khalil on December 21st 2017. Mr. Khalil was arrested under article 98(f) by security forces on accusations of defaming religion. He has also been accused of administering a Facebook page that promotes atheism. He is currently in detention pending further investigation.

As a party to the ICCPR, Egypt is obligated to uphold article 18 which states that, "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion." Furthermore, General Comment No. 22 explicitly states that the aim of the article is to protect monotheistic and non-monotheistic faiths, as well as atheists. Therefore, restricting the rights of atheist and justifying it on the grounds that freedom of religion only covers state approved Abrahamic religions, amounts to a failure of Egypt's obligations under international law.

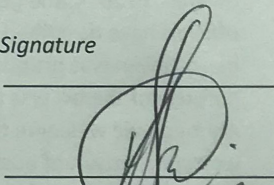
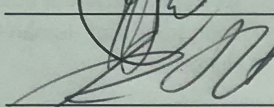
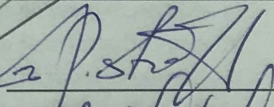
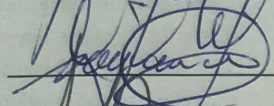
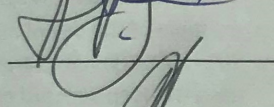
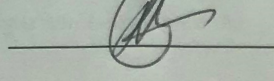
In response to the above, we would like to make a number of recommendations.

- Firstly, we recommend relevant Egyptian authorities to take immediate steps to end hostility towards atheists by state-affiliated bodies including, ordering its immediate halt and imposing disciplinary action.
- We encourage the immediate and unconditional release of atheists convicted under article 98 (f) including Ibrahim Khalil and urge the Egyptian government to take positive measures towards repealing or revising its blasphemy laws under article 98(f).
- Finally, we would encourage the Egyptian government to uphold their international obligations under article 18 of the ICCPR

Thank you for your consideration.

We look forward to hearing from you.

The following parliamentarians support this letter in their personal capacity and not as a representative of their government, political party or any other body.

Name	Country	Signature
<u>Nqabayomi Kwankwa</u>	<u>South Africa</u>	
<u>MILAN VASAZIĆ</u>	<u>MONTENEGRO</u>	
<u>VADIM PISTRINILUC</u>	<u>MOLDOVA</u>	
<u>Fernanda San Martín</u> <u>Carrasco</u>	<u>BOLIVIA</u>	
<u>Aleksandar Dujicovic</u>	<u>MONTENEGRO</u>	
<u>Paule Bogoevski</u>	<u>Macedonia</u>	

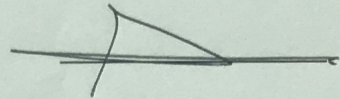
Name

Country

Signature

Mohammedali Taha

Iraq

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