



**CAIRO INSTITUTE
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For those Fighting the Sunrise

Key-note Speech for the Homo Homini Award for Human Rights

**And the 21st One World International Human Rights Documentary
Film Festival**

(Prague 2016)

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.

First of all allow me to thank People In Need for holding this ceremony. I would like to extend my thanks to all those who contributed to organizing the One World Film Festival, which draws much needed attention to human suffering and the strive for a better life across the globe.

I am truly grateful to be with you in Prague to honor this group of brave and distinguished ladies and gentlemen from Cuba. I'm also very honored to be where the great Vaclav Havel stood several times to present this award to human rights and democracy advocates.

The recipients of this year's award were part of a larger group of dissidents, which included journalists, human rights, and democracy activists, and who were imprisoned under the pretext of receiving foreign funding; a pretext used by despots across the globe. It is ironic indeed, that as I speak here tonight, the Egyptian government, which instead of being preoccupied with a counter terrorism campaign against ISIS to reclaim the north Sinai region, is launching a sweeping crackdown on human rights defenders and NGOs using the pretext of foreign funding as well.

Five years ago, the peoples of Arab countries took to the streets calling for democracy, freedom, and dignity. It would be incorrect, however, to assume that those demands were the only underlying causes of the protests, just as it would be inaccurate to state that Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution or Prague Spring were mere revolts against communist rule.

The Arab Spring symbolizes more than a fight between the militaries, liberals, leftists, and Islamists. At their hearts, both, the Velvet Revolution and the Arab Spring were rebellions by a new generation that has grown frustrated with the status quo; a generation that aspires to catch up with the rest of the world, to implement universal values and experience life and live it just as the rest of humanity does. Perhaps this was best explained by an average citizen during the Arab Spring who exclaimed in front of a TV camera in Egyptian Arabic “Ihna Awzeen natamataa be ho2o2hom” which translates to: we want to enjoy the rights other people have.

Just as a new generation of Czechoslovakians chanted “Máme holé ruce” which translates to “our hands are empty” in 1989, a new generation in the Arab region chanted “Silmeya” which translates to “peaceful” in 2011. Both, were peaceful movements aiming to replace old-fashioned and out-dated orders that were no longer able to deliver, or even comprehend, the way of life those new generations aspired to and deserved. But the response of the counter-revolutionary forces, military, Islamist extremists, terrorist groups, and security forces were so barbaric.

The counter-revolutionary forces across the Arab Region were vicious enough to engineer chaos and armed conflicts. In Syria for example, the regime released convicted jihadis from prisons in 2011 in order to add a violent and extremist flavor to a peaceful uprising, leading to the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. The use of chemical weapons and barrel bombs by al- Assad against civilians is the primary reason behind the huge waves of refugees and the massive death toll. Syrian refugees have been forced to flee to Europe to seek refuge, not to stay there. They look forward to go back to their homes tomorrow. In this context, I believe that Europe only has two options left; either to help the majority of the Syrian people choose their own government, or help Assad export more refugees to Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen, history has a habit of repeating itself. The fate of aged governing mentalities, of those who loose touch with reality, with common sense and become unwilling to allow modest reform and what modern ways of life have to offer, has always been the same.

A phrase like “Don’t listen to anyone but me”, should only be heard from a tribal leader from the stone age, when people were living in a total isolation and had no means of communication. Ironically enough, it is a prominent ruler in the Arab region who made such statement last month, at time of a global communication revolution. He assumes that this audacious call might help “stabilize” his government and country. But the fact of the matter is that this so called “stability” produces more poverty, illegal immigra-

tions, refugees, and terrorism. Stability in this context is an absolute mirage. What he offers is a recipe that at best promises a short-term stability disguised as genuine durable stability.

Almost two years ago, and after two months in office, I addressed President Abdelfatah al-Sisi of Egypt in an open letter. The letter read “you warn of the danger of Egypt following the path of Iraq, Syria, or Libya,” but “the unraveling of these countries and the ease with which terrorist groups have penetrated them would not have been possible were it not for one-man rule and the cult of Leadership”.

As long as President Sisi continues his war against young generations, the one thing I might agree with him on, is his assumption that the young figures of secular activism, who are now either in jail or in exile, pose a greater threat to his rule than any terrorist organization. But as history and life have repeatedly taught us, there is no way of stopping the sun from rising. The only way out for him is to prevent women from childbirth and stop new generations from coming to life. All those attempts are ultimately destined to failure. The question is not who is going to win, it's how long will it take the new generations and the future to triumph, and at what cost on the national, regional and international levels?

Last year, The Nobel Prize was awarded to the Tunisian civil society quartet. If I was a member of the Nobel Committee, I would have included a fifth actor, who made a decisive contribution for making the “Tunisian exception” possible. This fifth actor is the Tunisian military leadership, which refrained from interfering in politics and remained as a trusted distant guardian of the post-revolution political process; an example that military leaders from other Arab countries should take a closer look at.

It's about time to launch the long awaited and badly needed dialogue in Arab region between broadminded figures from the military leaderships, seculars and Islamists. I am sure that whenever and wherever such dialogue is launched, the international community will spare no efforts to give it the moral support it deserves and needs.

Thank you.