



CAIRO INSTITUTE  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES  
Institut du Caire pour les études des droits de l'homme  
مركز القاهرة لدراسات حقوق الإنسان

Colleagues, comrades, and friends

Thank you for allowing me speak with you today, and celebrate the work and sacrifice of human rights defenders from around the world.

I am deeply honored and grateful to be recognized by the esteemed Martin Ennals Award, and profoundly humbled to be nominated alongside defenders like Karla Avelar and FreeThe5KH. You inspire me, and dare us all to dream of a better tomorrow. Thank you for your courage.

I do not view this honor as a recognition of my work alone, but a recognition of the tens of thousands of Egyptian citizens who have been tortured, imprisoned, disappeared or killed over the last 6 years. Killed for nothing more than standing up to corruption and tyranny through peaceful means.

This award belongs to the many Egyptian human rights defenders standing bravely against the greatest threats they have ever faced since the emergence of the human rights movement in Egypt. In the midst unprecedented repression, they steadfastly endure in their struggle for freedom and dignity. They persevere in the face of constant attacks against them, including defamation campaigns, travel bans, asset freezes, torture, enforced disappearance, and the imminent threat of life imprisonment.

This award belongs to the dozens of Egyptian human rights organizations that the government is attempting to shut down, even as I speak; part of a systematic campaign to eradicate of one of the most dynamic human rights communities in the world.

This award also belongs to my colleagues and friends at the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, who give me strength and support on a daily basis, as they do for many human rights defenders throughout the Arab region.

Honored attendees:

The nominees in this year's ceremony represent the diverse threats increasingly faced by human rights defenders and communities in many places throughout the world. The case of Egypt is only one example. The Egyptian human rights movement is part of a global human rights movement, and that global movement is also under threat. And so we must begin to come together from all regions of the world and stand side by side if we are to emerge stronger from this critical moment in history.

For those in the audience tonight who are European citizens- our fates as citizens are also deeply connected. Your freedom and rights depend on also defending the freedom and rights of Egyptians. This is not just a catchy slogan; *it is a reality unfolding before our eyes*. Amnesty International recently warned of the threat of a "permanent state of emergency" forming in Europe, and we have all seen the steady rise of popular support for hate driven politics. These are only a shadow of what could be.

These recent events in Europe have in large part been driven by events in the Arab region- the collapse of states held together by brutal force instead of democratic legitimacy - followed by a mass exodus of desperate refugees. Extremist violence is nurtured by governments that do not allow peaceful dissent and in turn give rise to large-scale terrorist organizations that export their horrific violence across borders.

Yet, European policy makers continue to only pay lip-service to the importance of democracy and rights in my region- while clamoring to sell weapons and make profitable deals for a very narrow set of vested interests. By doing so, they not only betray the democratic values they have pledged to uphold- but also pave the way for the loss of your own liberty. I urge you all to demand your governments take courageous action to end this self-destructive cycle before it is too late, not just for people you may never meet but for your own family and friends.

In Egypt, as in many places— we must struggle not only to end human rights abuses, but also to resist the normalization of these abuses and acceptance of them as a routine part of daily life. I remember the first time an Egyptian court issued a judgment sentencing 529 people to death, my phone rang incessantly with journalists' requests for comment. A month later, when another mass death sentence was issued for an even larger number of defendants, I received no call. I realized then that human travesty can become ordinary, something people will adjust to in time. My fears were confirmed when another 188 people were later sentenced to death and then another 110 people, and no one paid attention.

General Sisi, now President, assumed public office in Egypt determined to smother any public life or civic action, blocking every outlet for expression, whether for his opponents, independent voices, or even those who disapproved of his policies in silence. This he considered the surest way to prevent a repeat of the 2011 uprising demanding democratic rule and basic dignity. He has not learned the true lesson of Qaddafi or Assad. Libya continues to suffer from the negative consequences of Qaddafi's rule; while Assad rules over the ashes of a destroyed Syria, a state that has killed more than one million of its own citizens.

Egypt faces undeniable security challenges. Terrorist attacks are no longer limited to Sinai, but have reached Cairo, Alexandria, and other provinces. But this does not seem to bother the Egyptian state. In fact, it provides an excuse to pass repressive laws in the name of combatting terrorism. For example, the new highly repressive NGO law that in effect outlaws independent civil society organizations was passed after the bombing of a church in Tanta and another in Alexandria.

The Egyptian state has proven to be a quite capable in using intelligence and spy technologies (the latter supplied by many democracies). Yet, it does not primarily deploy these capacities to capture terrorists or protect security patrols in Sinai. It instead uses them, for example, to target and arrest members of the LGBT community.

These are just a few examples in Egypt that highlight the issues that those that struggle against oppression around the world face, and which we must confront together as citizens from every walk of life.

Thank you once again for this honor, and I look forward to working with all of you for a better tomorrow.