

U.S. Sen. Baldwin, U.S. Rep. Pocan: Lead lawmakers in calling on president of Egypt to immediately release wrongfully detained human rights advocates

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Following the baseless detainment of human rights advocates by security forces in Egypt, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and U.S. Representative Mark Pocan (D-WI-02) are leading their Congressional colleagues in calling on Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to unconditionally release the detained human rights advocates, immediately cease other arrests and end the smear campaign against civil rights organizations in Egypt.

During the week of November 15, Egyptian security forces arrested Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) staff members Mohamed Basheer, Karim Ennarah, and Gasser Abdelrazek on baseless charges following a meeting with European ambassadors. Meanwhile, a coordinated smear campaign against EIPR is occurring in state-affiliated Egyptian media outlets, adding concerns that these politically-motivated efforts are intended to silence human rights defenders.

In their letter to President al-Sisi, the lawmakers write, “Punishing one of Egypt’s most prominent and respected human rights organizations for nothing more than carrying out its work is an alarming attack on Egypt’s civil society community.”

Following the arrests of EIPR staff, on November 23, Gasser Abdelrazek told his

lawyers he has been kept in solitary confinement, provided only a metal bed with no mattress, and insufficient clothing to keep him warm. This adds to the lawmakers' strong concerns with inhumane living conditions in Egypt's prisons, including allegations of mistreatment and torture.

Baldwin, Pocan and the lawmakers continue, *"These arrests of EIPR staff following meetings with foreign officials suggest that your government is seeking to criminalize engagement with foreign diplomats. Foreign governments must be able to meet with civil society organizations in Egypt—as they can and do freely in countries all over the world—without fear of retaliation. Engagement with local civil society is a vital component of international diplomacy. Governments and institutions around the world rely on analysis and reporting from these organizations to inform our understanding of human rights, including in Egypt.*

"The wrongful arrest of human rights defenders, use of arbitrary and extended detention to hold political prisoners, and other gross violations of human rights is inconsistent with the democratic norms the U.S. expects from its international security partners. Continuing these recent actions and ongoing crackdowns on civil society organizations undermines U.S.-Egyptian relations and sends a clear signal to us that this is not a relationship Egypt values."

In the Senate, the letter was also signed by Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Ed Markey (D-MA), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Dick Durbin (D-IL). In the House, the letter was also signed by Representatives Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ-12), Betty McCollum (D-MN-04), Don Beyer (D-VA-08), Rashida Tlaib (D-MI-13), Jim McGovern (D-MA-02), Ted Deutch (D-FL-22), Barbara Lee (D-CA-09), Adriano Espaillat (D-NY-13), Brad Sherman (D-CA-27), Gregory Meeks (D-NY-05), Katie Porter (D-CA-45), Joaquin Castro (D-TX-20), Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY-14), Jesús G. "Chuy" García (D-IL-04), David Cicilline (D-RI-01), David Trone (D-MD-06), Tom Malinowski (D-NJ-07), Gerry Connolly (D-VA-11), Ilhan Omar (D-MN-05), Jamie Raskin (D-MD-08), Raúl M. Grijalva (D-AZ-03), Ro Khanna (D-CA-17), Abigail Spanberger (D-VA-07), André Carson (D-IN-07) and David Price (D-NC-04).

The full letter is available [HERE](#). An online version of this release is available [HERE](#).