

Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi  
Residence of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces  
Cairo, Egypt

Dear Field Marshal Tantawi:

As former foreign ministers of our respective countries, we were dismayed to learn that on December 29, 2011 the offices of seven American, European and Egyptian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were subject to an armed raid; their property confiscated, their staff interrogated and their doors shut. Following the raids, pressure on these civil society organizations has increased as a criminal prosecution is proceeding, travel restrictions have been imposed on some employees and interrogations are ongoing. Moreover, media reports indicate that up to 400 organizations may be under investigation – most of them Egyptian organizations working in the fields of democracy, human rights and legal awareness.

The groups raided on December 29, and groups like them, are present in countries around the world to support democratic processes, promote human rights, advocate for freedom of the press and free association, and to assist in the development of governing institutions. We know directly or by reputation many of these groups. We believe that the work of non-governmental, inter-governmental and international organizations are an indispensable component of a thriving community of democracies.

Domestic and international democracy and human rights NGOs can help support the transition plan that you and other Egyptian officials have proposed as well as help Egyptian citizens participate fully in that process. Indeed, several of the organizations that were raided were officially accredited election witnesses during the recent parliamentary elections and issued constructive reports on the process.

Freedom of association and speech are fundamental to any democratic system. This is one of the most important lessons that each one of us learned while serving our countries as foreign ministers. Non-governmental organizations must be able to carry out their mandates openly and freely. Harsh and undue restrictions on civil society profoundly undermine the progress that has been made in your country.

As has been the case in Europe, Africa, Latin America, Asia and elsewhere in the Middle East, the presence and ability of these organizations to support the leadership and initiative of local democracy activists is, as you know, one signal the international community considers to understand how an important transition is proceeding.

Egypt has made tremendous strides in the past year. Following a largely peaceful transfer of power to a temporary military government, a referendum was held on constitutional change, new political parties formed, an election held and a parliament seated which is reflective of the will of the people. We would urge that you not allow these positive strides to be overshadowed by completely unnecessary actions against civil society.

We look forward to Egypt's entry into the community of democratic nations and its adherence to the principles of free association. We would ask that you immediately end the onerous restrictions on civil society, cease the prosecution of NGOs, free citizens imprisoned for exercising freedom of speech and move expeditiously on the path to civilian rule.

Sincerely,

Madeleine K. Albright – United States  
Halldór Ásgrímsson – Iceland  
Erik Derycke – Belgium  
Lamberto Dini – Italy  
Jan Eliasson – Sweden  
Joschka Fischer – Germany  
Jaime Gama – Portugal  
Igor S. Ivanov – Russia  
Don McKinnon – New Zealand  
Marwan Muasher – Jordan  
Ana Palacio – Spain  
Niels Helveg Petersen – Denmark  
Surin Pitsuwan – Thailand  
Lydie Polfer – Luxembourg  
Malcolm Rifkind – United Kingdom  
Adam Daniel Rotfeld – Poland  
Javier Solana – Spain  
Knut Vollebaek – Norway

cc: Prime Minister Kamal Al-Ganzoury  
Cabinet of Ministers  
2 Magless El-Shaab Street  
Kasr El-Ainy  
Cairo, Egypt

Mohamed Saad El-Katatni, Speaker of the House  
People's Assembly  
Magless El-Shaab Street  
Kasr El-Ainy  
Cairo, Egypt