April 22, 2021

Dear Mr. Secretary and Mr. Sullivan:

We write to strongly urge the administration not to use the national security waiver on the $300 million in Foreign Military Financing to Egypt for Fiscal Year 2020 that is conditioned on meeting several human rights standards.

We are grateful for the administration’s vocal support for human rights and democracy in Egypt. It is heartening to hear repeated statements of concern from the State Department regarding the Egyptian government’s repression of civil society and undue restrictions on freedom of expression and the press. In particular, we welcome Secretary Blinken raising these concerns directly with Egyptian Foreign Minister Shoukry, and telling him that human rights "would be central to the U.S.-Egypt bilateral relationship."

Last month, the State Department’s annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices identified a litany of serious violations of human rights by Egyptian authorities. These include consistent attacks on the freedom of expression; violations of the rule of law; extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances; widespread use of arbitrary detention; and politically motivated reprisals against individuals located outside the country.
In response to such abuses, since 2014 Congress has conditioned a portion of the $1.3 billion of annual military aid to Egypt. Unable to certify improvements in Egypt’s abysmal human rights record, the two previous administrations have used a national security waiver provided by Congress each year to release the conditioned portion of military aid. By using the waiver, the United States signals that the Egyptian government will not be held accountable for its human rights abuses and that it can continue to violate human rights standards without consequence.

During his campaign for president, then-candidate Joe Biden promised “no more blank checks for Trump’s favorite dictator.” Overriding the human rights conditions would, on the contrary, continue the pattern of providing “blank checks” to the Egyptian government. This is a genuine opportunity for the administration to put human rights at the center of the relationship.

As the State Department has determined in its annual reports and as numerous human rights organizations have documented, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s government has continued its consistent pattern of gross human rights violations, and has not come close to meeting any of the six legislative conditions related to human rights and the rule of law. By refusing to waive these conditions, the United States will send a clear message that it is serious about its commitment to supporting human rights abroad, that it will follow through on its promises, and that respect for human rights is inextricably linked to U.S. national security.

Thank you for your consideration, and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with you further.

Sincerely,

Amnesty International USA
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
Committee to Protect Journalists
Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN)
Egyptian Human Rights Forum
EuroMed Rights
Freedom House
Human Rights First
Human Rights Watch
MENA Rights Group
PEN America
Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
The Freedom Initiative