**TESTIMONY OF TAD STAHNKE**
**DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND PROGRAMS**
**HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST**

**BEFORE THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE ON**
**AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND INTERNATIONAL**
**ORGANIZATIONS**

**"HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN EGYPT"**
**December 10, 2013**

**Introduction**

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank
you for convening this hearing to examine the growing human rights abuses in
Egypt, with a particular emphasis on religious freedom and the situation for
religious minorities in Egypt. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to share
Human Rights First's findings and recommendations on this important matter and
to discuss ways that we can work together with you to advance human rights
protections in an increasingly volatile country that remains very important to the
United States. We are grateful to you, Mr. Chairman, for your leadership on keeping
key human rights issues front and center in the Congress. We look forward to
continuing to work with you and Ranking Member Bass and others on the
Subcommittee to assist in these efforts.

Human Rights First has longstanding ties with human rights defenders and civil
society leaders in Egypt. In the past three years, we have focused considerable
attention on the country, making repeated visits, issuing multiple reports as well as
dozens of statements intended to promote U.S. leadership in improving respect for
human rights there. Religious freedom is a universally recognized and fundamental
human right; it is the cornerstone of freedom of expression and assembly, which are
essential for secure and thriving societies. Religious freedom is also a human
security issue, and as such it needs to be taken into account in U.S. national security
and counterterrorism, conflict prevention and mitigation, and democracy promotion
strategies. This is particularly true with respect to the current political upheavals in
the Middle East, where in Egypt and elsewhere successful transitions will be
measured by the embrace of religious pluralism and whether religion will be used as
a weapon to suppress dissent and the rights of women and religious minorities.

The rapidly deteriorating situation of Egypt's Coptic Christian minority is an
alarming symptom of an unresolved and worsening broader political crisis. Egypt

has been a key partner and ally for the United States for decades.  It is also a bellwether for other states in the region.  An Egypt racked by instability and violence represents a serious long-term threat to U.S. interests.  It would also have a negative impact on prospects for a more stable Middle East, making more remote the vision of a peaceful region in which the rights of all are protected.

**Crisis for Egypt's Coptic Community**

Egyptian human rights organizations are reporting an unprecedented escalation in sectarian attacks against Egypt's Coptic Christians since the military violently dispersed protesting Morsi supporters on August 14, 2013.  Armed police backed by the military used force, including live ammunition, to clear protests that had been established after the dismissal of President Morsi on July 3.  Hundreds of people were killed in the worst incident of political violence in Egypt for many decades.  Total fatalities from clearing the sit-ins reached over 800, with dozens of members of the security forces also losing their lives.  In another serious incident, some 55 pro-Morsi protesters were killed at a single demonstration in Cairo on October 6.  Well over 2,000 people have been killed in political demonstrations since August 14.

While discrimination, anti-Christian incitement, and periodic incidents of sectarian violence, sometimes fatal, have long been a feature of Egyptian life, the political polarization of the past few months has taken this violence and the level of threat against the Christian minority to unprecedented levels.  In a letter to President Obama dated September 12, 2013, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) noted that over 130 Coptic churches and Christian religious structures, homes, and businesses have been attacked since August 14.  Around 45 churches and religious structures came under simultaneous attack in the immediate aftermath of August 14.  Unfortunately, the Egyptian pattern of impunity for sectarian attacks continues. A leading Egyptian human rights group was warning that a failure to recognize the seriousness of the situation "may push the country toward broad civil violence."

This spike in anti- Christian violence has abated in recent weeks, although isolated attacks on Christians, their homes, businesses, and churches continue.  The sudden rise and fall in the frequency of attacks has fueled rumors and speculation about who was responsible for the anti-Christian assaults.  The official government-backed version of events is that disgruntled Morsi supporters took revenge on Christians whom they blamed for having conspired to depose President Morsi.  The intensity of official efforts to denigrate the Brotherhood and its supporters, and the way that reports of these attacks fed into a narrative that the authorities are engaged in a fight against violent religious extremists, whose extremism is demonstrated by their attacks on Christians, fed a competing theory that the authorities let these acts of violence take place for their own political advantage—and may even have, in some instances, instigated them—making the Christian victims of these attacks collateral damage in a cynical political maneuver.

For decades, institutionalized discrimination against Christians; official unwillingness to investigate violent attacks on Christians or to hold perpetrators or those who incite violence criminally accountable; and toleration of sectarian hate speech in the media, including the government-controlled media, have contributed to chronic problems of persecution and insecurity for the approximately 10% of Egypt's 85 million population who are Coptic Christians. Not all Christians are economically disadvantaged. There is a history of certain Christian families prospering in business. The Sawiris family controls one of Egypt's largest private business empires, for example, creating a perception that Christians have benefited unfairly from state patronage, and thereby fueling resentment from the majority Muslim community, even if the reality for the great majority of the Christian population is one of systematic discrimination and relative disadvantage.

These problems were well known and had been getting worse in the later years of President Mubarak's long period of rule, during which time a disturbing pattern of mass killings of Christians—followed by insufficient investigations and a lack of accountability—began to emerge. Perhaps the two most notorious examples of this disturbing trend are the Nag Hammadi massacre of January 8, 2010, in which 11 Copts were shot outside a church in a small town in Upper Egypt, and the car bombing of a Coptic church in the city of Alexandria on January 1, 2011, in which at least 21 worshipers were killed and many more injured while attending New Year's Eve services, another serious incident of anti-Christian violence in which the authorities are alleged to have played a role.

**The Political Context for the Current Crisis**

The mass protests of January and February 2011 that brought down the thirty-year presidency of Hosni Mubarak were actively supported by many Christians. Religious coexistence was one of the several positive values publicly espoused by Egyptian protesters.

However, two legacies of the overthrow of President Mubarak have had a detrimental impact on the situation of Coptic Christians in Egypt. The first is a general decline in public safety that has left vulnerable minority communities at risk of harassment and violence, with little hope of protection or justice from the police or local authorities. The second is a highly polarized struggle over the political future of Egypt that has become increasingly violent in recent months. The Morsi government must bear its proportion of the blame for fueling a climate of anti-Christian intolerance even during its time in office, when its rhetoric became increasingly paranoid and Christians were among the forces said to be conspiring to overthrow the elected government. Protests against the Morsi government were often described as having been promoted by Christians and populated by Christian participants, when in fact street protests have been an almost constant feature of Egyptian public life since January 2011 and such protests rarely had a sectarian cast. This demonizing of the minority population contributed to a climate in which violence against Christians could easily take place.

It is not surprising that the removal of Mubarak – who stifled political opposition for decades – should lead to a political vacuum and a period of uncertainty. What is regrettable is that the political contest in Egypt continues to be reduced to a binary competition between military-backed authoritarianism—currently represented by General Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, the Commander in Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces, the chief public instigator of the military overthrow of President Morsi—and Islamic extremism, currently portrayed in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood, the clandestine religious movement in which President Morsi was a senior figure.

Unfortunately, the two poles of the binary competition for power between the military and the Muslim Brotherhood feed off each other. Each side points to the excesses of the other as justification for their own authoritarian actions. This has produced a vicious circle of escalating repression and instability that squeezes out alternative political voices and cuts away at the middle ground.

It is important to emphasize that the political spectrum in Egypt is much more complicated than this binary depiction allows. Political movements of different kinds have emerged since February 2011, including a wide array of liberals, leftists, nationalists, and Islamists. Some of these movements are moderate, inclusive of religious diversity and supportive of basic rights and freedoms for all Egyptians; others, like some of the so-called Salafi Islamic political movements, are openly hostile to such values. One of the ironies of the current situation is that, in order to provide a façade of including Islamist political groups, the interim government has included representatives of Salafi political parties in the constitution drafting process and has not closed down their political parties or detained and prosecuted their leaders, even though their political ideas are more extreme than many of the Muslim Brotherhood leaders and supporters who are currently in jail and branded as extremists. In common with the opportunism that seems to have characterized the behavior of virtually all political factions in Egypt, the Salafi parties have been happy to go along with this arrangement, presumably in the hope that they will gain advantage over their main rivals in the Islamist political camp, the Muslim Brotherhood.

In the elections that have taken place since Mubarak's removal, Egyptians have sometimes engaged in tactical voting. For example, many democratically-inclined, non-Islamist voters chose Morsi over Ahmed Shafik, a former general associated with the military-backed Mubarak regime, in the run-off vote in the presidential elections in June 2012. But in doing so they sought to throw off the vestiges of the old regime and did not endorse the maximalist political program of Islamization, (or Ikwhanization) of the state that the Morsi government gave the appearance of aspiring to become. Alienated over time, many of these former Morsi voters became supporters of the Tamarrod movement and called for the president's removal from power, or at least for early presidential elections. One of the many failings of the Morsi presidency is that he failed to realize that his coming to power was not a ringing endorsement by the Egyptian people of the Muslim Brotherhood's agenda.

His actions in power disregarded the views of many of the people who voted for him—not to mention, the great majority of Egyptians did not vote for him at all.

Similarly, many of those who supported the Tamarrod movement, and may even have supported, or at least acquiesced to, the military removal of President Morsi on July 3, did not do so expecting to be implicated in the mass killing of hundreds of protesters on August 14 , and the further violence that has ensued, or the wholesale round up of Muslim Brotherhood political leaders, or the intensifying restrictions on the media, the increased use of military trials against civilians and the return of the super-empowered national security state that has emerged in the last five months.

It is the great misfortune of the Copts that they are pawns in this highly destructive zero-sum political game between the Muslim Brotherhood and the military-backed national security state.  Supporters of President Morsi have openly blamed the Copts for the removal of their president, claiming that Christian hostility to Islam and to the idea of a Muslim Egypt they claim to represent led them to conspire with the military and hostile foreign powers, like Israel and the United States, to overthrow a legitimately elected president.  The disproportionate blame attached to the Christian community by Morsi supporters after July 3 made the community more exposed and vulnerable to the violence that has followed.

At the same time, the military-backed government and its supporters seem more interested in pointing to the anti-Christian violence as evidence of the extremism of the Muslim Brotherhood than in taking effective measures to protect Christians and their places of worship, homes and businesses from attack. While the current situation is more extreme than in the past, this is not a new phenomenon.  The Mubarak regime was always ready to point to the violent excesses of Islamic extremists as an excuse to resist any pressure to implement political reform or liberalization.  In a statement dated August 25, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights noted: "The security apparatus in particular has not changed the way it deals with such attacks, an approach inherited from the era of ousted President Mubarak. It has failed to intervene to prevent escalation and has been slow to respond to citizens' pleas for help."  The pattern of impunity in the aftermath of sectarian attacks continues.

Supporters of President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood leadership cannot escape complicity in the escalation of attacks on the Copts.  The last few months in Egypt may be seen as an object lesson in the dangers of incitement and how hateful language leads to violence.  The Brotherhood in its official publications and websites, and in the statements of some of its leaders, has long tolerated anti-Christian sectarian statements, speaking about the need for an Islamist Egypt in which the Copts would be, at best, second-class citizens.

The more open media environment after the overthrow of Mubarak permitted the emergence of a variety of Islamist media outlets, some of them backed by funding from extreme religious movements in the Arab Gulf region. Hateful sectarian

rhetoric, targeting Christians, Jews, Shi'ite Muslims, and non-Islamist critics of Islamic extremism became more commonplace. The protests that sprang up after the removal of President Morsi from office on July 3 featured much inflammatory rhetoric blaming the Christians for supporting the military takeover.

This climate of political manipulation, hatred and incitement underlies the recent wave of violence. One of the worst incidents of retaliation against Copts for their supposed role in engineering the ouster of President Morsi occurred in the town of Dalga in Minya governorate. After July 3, Islamic extremists claiming to be supporters of President Morsi took control of the town, expelled the police and carried out a pogrom against the Christian population. Churches and Christian homes and businesses were burned and vandalized and Christians were forced to pay protection money to their Muslim neighbors, termed a "jizya" to give it some supposed legitimacy in terms of Islamic law. More than a hundred Christian families are reported to have fled from the town.

Egyptian human rights groups condemned the slow response of the authorities to this violent assault on the Christian community in Dalga. Only on September 16, after more than 76 days of the town being under the control of armed Islamic extremists—during which time a 4th century Christian church was burned to the ground—did the security forces move in to reclaim control of the town. Even then, the authorities did not make special efforts to protect the remaining Christian population or to facilitate the return of Christians forced out of the town.

The response of the Muslim Brotherhood to the violence in Dalga was instructive in that it showed both the way some Brotherhood media outlets used the violence to try to further blame the Copts for encouraging state violence against the Brotherhood, while using other, English language, media outlets to express solidarity with the Copts and to blame the authorities for failing to protect places of worship.

The Arabic language website of the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party accused some Christian families in Dalga of "spreading false news" about the assaults on Christians in the town. It accused the Copts and their supporters of making false accusations in order to legitimize a further massacre of Brotherhood supporters by the security forces. Such accusations can only increase the animosity of Morsi supporters against Christians and make them more likely to condone, if not actively support, anti-Christian violence.

This pattern of different Muslim Brotherhood media outlets and different spokespeople delivering multiple, inconsistent messages has been observed before. Mina Fayek, writing on the Atlantic Council's Egypt Source blog, referred to this practice as "the Brotherhood's Doublespeak." For every conciliatory statement about tolerance and inclusion a competing quote can be found that conveys the opposite message.

The rapid deterioration in the situation of the Copts in Egypt is inextricably bound up with Egypt's political crisis, and it is hard to see how there will be substantial improvement in their current dire situation absent progress towards a political solution in Egypt that will require movement towards political reconciliation as a first step.

It continues to be the case, as it was under Mubarak, the SCAF, and the Morsi government, that the Egyptian authorities need to enhance the protection for the Coptic community, to be more responsive to complaints from the Christian community of assaults or harassment from extremists, and to hold accountable those who incite and take part in sectarian violence. The current government also should remove some of the long-standing restrictions on freedom of religion and building blocks of legal and societal discrimination targeting religious minorities, which would include repealing abusive laws prohibiting blasphemy and defamation of religions, repealing the decree banning Baha'is, and enacting a unified law for the construction and repair of all places of worship.

But these recommendations in and of themselves are inadequate as a response to the crisis now confronting Egypt's Copts and by extension the people of Egypt. The authorities to whom these recommendations might be directed are the same ones who have been in power in Egypt for many decades. They are unlikely to change their ingrained habits of giving low priority to the complaints of persecuted Christians. As noted above, their leaders may even see some advantage in such assaults against Christians continuing because it enables them to build their narrative of being engaged in a struggle against terrorists and extremists.

**The Broader Challenges for Human Rights and Democratic Development in Egypt**

The escalating persecution of Christians is a symptom of an unresolved political crisis in Egypt that, if left to fester, could result in many disturbing developments that would destabilize the region, hold back any possibility of economic development or peaceful democratic transition or the protection of human rights in Egypt, and be profoundly harmful to U.S. interests and to the interests of American allies.

The overall rights environment has been in steady decline throughout most of the transition, especially under SCAF rule starting in mid-2011, and continued to decline under Morsi. However, things have taken a dramatic turn for the worse in the aftermath of the July 3 coup.

The removal from office of President Morsi on July 3 by the military was met with widespread appreciation by many people in Egypt. (It is hard to know whether the supporters of the removal of Morsi represented a majority of Egyptians, or not.) Many of those who identified with the democratic, inclusive ideals of the protests that brought down President Mubarak joined the popular movement for Tamarrod

(rebellion) and were prepared to see military force used as their instrument, viewing the continuation in power of President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood as a greater threat to Egypt's democratic future than the military removal of a democratically-elected president. After mass popular protests led to the removal from office of President Mubarak in February 2011, popular street protests have assumed high prestige as indicators of political legitimacy. It has arguably become a challenge to prospects for peaceful democratic change in Egypt that street protests confer more popular legitimacy than electoral processes. It remains the case that an effective way to campaign for political change in Egypt is to mobilize large numbers of people in the streets. Popular mobilizations against the recently adopted law on public assembly are only the most recent example of this, and in accordance with recent practice, the interim government, or at least parts of it, seem prepared to take the protesters' objections into consideration.

The interim government appointed by the military to replace President Morsi's government included several credible liberal figures. Many have commented on the irony that a military coup may have resulted in Egypt's best qualified and most competent government ever. The appointment of Mohamed el-Baradei, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, and a leader in the opposition to President Mubarak, as a vice-president for international affairs was a powerful statement that the intervention of the military in Egypt's political life would be a return to the democratic ideals of the Arab Spring and not a reassertion of control by the military-backed security establishment.

This was not to be. No single act has set the tone for the military-backed interim government more than the August 14 dispersal of the pro-Morsi protests in greater Cairo at the cost of over 800 lives. Objections that some of the pro-Morsi protesters were armed and had themselves used violence cannot excuse this disproportionate use of force.

The incidents of August 14 are not the only violations of human rights perpetrated by the interim government. There have been further incidents of mass killings of protesters, such as on October 6. The authorities have held President Morsi and his close advisers in almost total incommunicado detention since his removal from office on July 3. Thousands of senior Muslim Brotherhood leaders have been detained since August 14 and held under sweeping charges of involvement in violence or terrorism.

Media outlets have been closed down, some of which gave a platform for extremists who incited hatred against Christians and other religious minorities, but other more mainstream outlets, like parts of Al-Jazeera, whose coverage was seen as too favorable to the Muslim Brotherhood, have also been closed.

The official media has embarked on a witch hunt against the Brotherhood and their supporters, who are indiscriminately painted as terrorists and extremists.

The harassment and persecution has not stopped at supporters or alleged supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. Non-Islamist critics of the military-backed interim government, like Ahmed Maher, a founder and leader of the April 6 youth movement that was central to the February 2011 uprising, have also been targeted with a criminal investigation for failing to endorse the repressive tactics of the military-backed government. Mohamed al-Baradei, who resigned from the government after August 14, has also found himself the target of a criminal investigation for criticizing the government's approach.

The military-backed government's repression of dissenting opinion, its insistence on a "you are either with us or against us" approach, has created a chilling climate for freedom of expression that is redolent of thought control associated with repressive dictatorial regimes of the past.

The methods associated with this kind of rule are from the well-worn playbook of the Mubarak era. The state security apparatus, sidelined and chastened by the uprising and its aftermath, is also back, promoting a general climate of fear and intimidation under the rubric of a "war on terrorism." Extended periods of incommunicado pre-trial detention are conducive to torture that is also reported to be returning as a common practice.

To make matters worse, all of this is taking place against the backdrop of a consistent breakdown in rule of law and the deterioration of state institutions. Again, this trend began under SCAF and continued under Morsi, both of whom engaged in politically-motivated prosecutions and selective law enforcement, and even encouraged vigilante violence when it suited their political ends. The decline of the state is most dramatic in the Sinai, where decades of state neglect and marginalization have combined with political instability and the massive influx of weapons from Libya and Sudan to escalate what was previously a low-level insurgency. But the trend has also reached the Nile valley heartland, as evidenced by the recent assassination attempt against the minister of the interior as well as the recent takeover of towns by Islamist mobs that have chased away the police for many weeks.

The return of the full-blown repressive security state will not bring lasting stability to Egypt, even if it may temporarily tamp down raw opposition to military takeover. The results of this approach are already becoming clear, partly in the escalation of attacks against Coptic Christians, but also in other acts of political violence, like the assassination attempt mentioned above. Egypt has been down this road before with a brutal clampdown on the Brotherhood and Islamism, resulting in acts of terrorism and low level civil conflict. There is no reason to believe that the current repression will be any more successful than its previous iterations, and every reason to fear that the consequences may be even worse.

**Implications for U.S. Policy**

The derailing of Egypt's democratic transition into a polarized, increasingly violent political conflict is a seriously negative development that requires a much more robust response from the United States if a way forward is to be found. Indeed, the United States should implement a major shift in policy to one that puts Egypt's commitment to human rights and democratization at its core. Supporting repressive governments in spite of authoritarian abuses, gross human rights violations, and growing internal instability has failed in the past. Human Rights First set out new recommendations in a [Blueprint](#) for U.S. government policy last week.

Influential voices in Egyptian society—old and new—are suspicious of the U.S. government's commitment to human rights. The U.S. embassy in Cairo needs to work with embassies from like-minded countries to show consistent and public support for independent civil society, and to explain to the Egyptian public how and why it is supporting democratic values—not as some conspiracy to undermine Egypt's sovereignty and harm Egypt's interests, but as part of a global commitment to promoting and protecting universal values of human rights.

The United States should turn an entirely new page on how it engages with Egyptian governments and the Egyptian people. Rather than giving its support and seeking cooperation with successive authoritarian leaders in Cairo, U.S. policy should be rooted in seeking to promote stability, and a return to inclusive civilian government in Egypt through respect for human rights and the rule of law. If it does not take this opportunity, the United States will inevitably continue to lose credibility and influence in a country it desperately needs to be stable and free.

Egypt's political crisis is a global and regional problem. The United States must work multilaterally with its regional and European allies who stand to be most adversely affected by any further deterioration in the political situation in Egypt. Working together with its allies can begin to exert diplomatic pressure on all parties to the conflict to end the discourse of mutual destruction, and move towards reconciliation. It may also help reverse unprecedented levels of anti-American sentiment, tied to the perception of U.S. policies toward Egypt that pay little heed to the interests of the Egyptian people.

If the Coptic Christian minority in Egypt is to be protected, political reconciliation, including permitting some supporters of President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood back into the political process, is imperative. As noted above, incitement from Morsi supporters and from the Muslim Brotherhood as an institution has contributed to the spike in violence against Christians in Egypt. For such violence to decrease it will be necessary for credible leaders associated with Morsi and the Brotherhood to adopt a discourse that consistently condemns such violence. While thousands of the Brotherhood's leaders and supporters are in jail, including its senior leadership and the leadership of it political party, the Freedom and Justice Party, there is no one with the stature to speak in the name of the

organization to disown and condemn the violence.  There is also no incentive for the Brotherhood to take such a conciliatory position.

Indiscriminate labeling of all Brotherhood supporters as extremists and terrorists, as the official media in Egypt is now determined to do, and the punishment of those who dare to question or depart from this official narrative, only makes such necessary reconciliation more difficult.

The United States should not ask the Egyptian authorities to accommodate Islamists who espouse violence in their political discourse or practice as part of Egypt's political system, but leaving the large part of the Egyptian electorate that wishes to support an Islamist political party in elections disenfranchised is not a recipe for stability or inclusiveness. The United States should publicly promote reconciliation and initiate a process leading to the formation of an inclusive, civilian-led, democratic government in Cairo, and explain to Egyptians how it plans to encourage reform, human rights, and the rule of law.

There must be clear, uniform conditions set for the registration and operation of political parties that agree to be bound by the rules of peaceful, democratic contestation.  Espousing sectarian hatred should not be part of any legal party's platform, but claiming inspiration from the non-violent values of a religious tradition must be accommodated.

The adoption of a new draft constitution provides some opportunities for the U.S. government to frame its interactions with Egyptian leaders geared towards promoting human rights using language and provisions that appear in the new draft. The new draft includes some enhanced protections for international standards and the Egyptian authorities should be encouraged to live up to them.  With respect to the situation of religious minorities, the new draft includes a prohibition against discrimination on religious grounds.  There is an unusual constitutional article requiring the new Parliament, when it is elected, to pass a long-discussed uniform law on the repair and construction of religious buildings.  This law would be aimed to overcome official obstacles to the repair and construction of churches, and to facilitate the repair of the many churches damaged in recent protests.  At the same time, there are elements of the draft that raise human rights concerns, especially the continuation of the right of the military to try civilians before military courts, and the lack of accountability of the military to civilian authorities.  Of even more concern, adopting a draft constitution including safeguards for basic rights and freedoms while flagrant violations of the right to freedom of assembly have just been imposed, while thousands of the government's political opponents are jailed and subject to judicial proceedings that lack fairness and appear selective, and while violence by the security forces has been unleashed against civilians with unprecedented ferocity, does not inspire confidence that fine language will be translated into effective safeguards.

Working with its donor partners the United States must establish sizeable, sustained economic incentives for Egypt's leaders that should be conditioned on Egypt adhering to democratic norms and international human rights standards. Consistent with the policy goal of supporting the rule of law and human rights, the United States should use its voice and vote at the IMF to refrain from approving loans to Egypt until sound economic policies are in place and meaningful progress is made on key human rights and rule of law benchmarks. The United States should also communicate to other potential lenders and donors its assessment of Egypt's economic progress and reliability. Egypt's economy desperately needs liquidity, but an IMF loan absent human rights reforms is a recipe for a new economic crisis and continued instability.

While the initial investment from the United States and its partners would have to be large if it was to have the desired effect, the benefits to the international community of a successful transition and an economic recovery in Egypt would be commensurately large. The costs of failing to adequately support Egypt at this time of peril for the country would be unimaginably high, and the Christians of Egypt would be among the first victims.

The Obama Administration suspended the delivery of "certain military systems" after the coup and the ensuing violence, and President Obama stated that the resumption of military assistance "will depend upon Egypt's progress in pursuing a democratic path." The president is right to set human rights and democracy conditions on military aid to Egypt. The Egyptian military leadership holds effective political power in Cairo. If it wishes to benefit from a close, cooperative military relationship with the United States then it must use this power to move Egypt back on to a path of peaceful, inclusive, civilian-led governance.

The United States government knows the values and practices that undergird the functioning of a successful democratic state. These include the rule of law, protected by an independent judiciary; a free press, and clear legal protections for freedom of expression; religious freedom and protection of the rights of religious minorities; and strong independent civil society organizations with the capacity to monitor the behavior and conduct of government institutions and to expose official wrongdoing. This infrastructure cannot be built overnight, and it must be put in place by Egyptians themselves. U.S. policy should be geared towards producing a substantial multilateral initiative to help Egyptians build this necessary infrastructure. The State Department and USAID should continue to find ways—bilaterally and/or multilaterally—to fund civil society efforts to combat human rights abuses and promote religious pluralism and tolerance.