



March 5, 2015

In recent years, Egyptian civil society - including the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community - has been targeted and weakened by successive Egyptian governments, which have used their authority to push back against democratic advances.

As a leading member of the business community, and as a speaker at the upcoming [Egypt Economic Development Conference](#), we would like to encourage you to leverage your remarks to discuss how a strong civil society attracts investment and contributes to a healthy vibrant economy, and the economic benefits that accrue from an inclusive and open political environment.

On the other hand, evidence from Egypt would suggest that in a climate of uncertainty, policies and practices that weaken civil society, including those that lead to the arrest and imprisonment of members of the LGBT community, have dampened economic growth - including in public-facing sectors such as tourism.

While same-sex relations between consenting adults are not illegal in Egypt, there has been a recent crackdown against those suspected of being LGBT. In the past six months, [at least](#) 80 people have been arrested on accusations related to their perceived sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

- In [November](#), eight men were sentenced to three years in prison after being spotted in a YouTube video that the authorities alleged depicted a same-sex wedding.
- In [December](#), in a widely publicized raid on a Cairo bathhouse, 26 men were arrested and charged with “public debauchery” and “public indecency” because of their perceived or actual sexual orientation. These men were [acquitted](#) of all charges in a surprise court ruling, a decision that was upheld by the Egyptian Supreme Court. Yet even those acquitted face ongoing discrimination, harassment and persecution because of their arrests.
- In [January](#), a transgender woman was sentenced to six years for “debauchery” after police claimed that she posted inappropriate videos of her dancing on social media.
- In [February](#), seven people were arrested under allegations of “debauchery.” The arrest related to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. According to the initial reports, they were targeted using fake online pages set up by the Egyptian police.
- In some of these cases, the police have worked in concert with [journalists](#) to ensure that the arrests are made highly visible to the public and broadcast widely in order to shame the individuals arrested and alienate them from their families and communities.

In light of this crackdown, which is perceived by many insiders and observers to be politically motivated, there is ongoing concern for the safety and the security of the LGBT community, as well as others in civil society.



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As you know, your company has performed remarkably well on the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index (CEI). Your company knows the economic and social benefits of having a diverse and inclusive workplace. We urge you to expand upon that commitment to equality by engaging your colleagues and partners at the Egypt Economic Development Conference in important conversations about how a diverse and inclusive society could better attract investment to Egypt and the long term benefits of such an approach.

I welcome the opportunity to speak to you about this issue, and the important role you can play in making Egypt a better investment opportunity, and encouraging a stronger and more just Egypt at the same time.

Sincerely,

Ty Cobb  
Director, HRC Global