



CONGRESSIONAL  
LGBT EQUALITY CAUCUS

**COUNTRY UPDATE: EGYPT**

January 20, 2015

Dear Friend:

As Co-Chair of the Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus and a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and because we share an interest in human rights around the world, I write to update you on the challenges faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals in other countries.

As you know, across the world members of the **LGBT community face some of the most horrific human rights violation being reported today**. Over seventy countries and territories criminalize same-sex activity, with varied punishments including imprisonment, forced labor, forced psychiatric treatment, corporal punishment, banishment, and the death penalty. LGBT individuals around the world face homelessness, harassment, persecution, exclusion from society, lack of access to medical care, and a variety of other challenges, simply for being who they are. Despite these continued difficulties, in many countries LGBT communities are celebrating their first Pride events and governments are improving laws regarding the equal rights of LGBT people. I hope you will join me in supporting the fight for full equality around the world.

Egypt, as we all know, has suffered great political and social strife in recent years. As the country continues to struggle with political unrest, economic stress, and security threats, progress toward LGBT equality faces serious obstacles.

**Egypt Key Facts:**

- In a historic decision for the country, [26 men were acquitted in January of debauchery charges](#), code for LGBT activity, an offense for which no Egyptian trial court has ever declined to convict its defendants.
- Egypt faced international scrutiny this month as trials began for the [eight men arrested when footage, allegedly depicting the country's "first gay marriage," became public](#) in September.
- LGBT identities are very taboo in Egypt, and [95% of Egyptians believe that "homosexuality is morally unacceptable."](#)
- Though laws do not explicitly criminalize same-sex activity, police often arrest LGBT people on charges of immorality – “prostitution,” “violating public decency,” or acting “offensive to public morals.” Most are subject to jail time, and once accused of such a crime, carry a stigma the rest of their lives.

Below you will find an in-depth fact-sheet on LGBT individuals in Egypt that I hope will be useful.

Sincerely,

David N. Cicilline  
*Member of Congress*



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## COUNTRY UPDATE: EGYPT

Egypt sits in the northeast corner of Africa, bordering both the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Egypt has an incredibly rich history as home to one of the world's oldest civilizations, but it also has, unfortunately, a recent past stained by political turmoil. Because the country is largely dependent on the Nile River and lacks other fertile land, the government has struggled to meet the demands of the country's rapidly growing population. As a result, the nation's resources and population have faced unprecedented stressors. Inspired by the Tunisian revolution of 2010, [government opposition began countrywide demonstrations and labor strikes](#), leading to the removal of former President Hosni Mubarak. A period of military leadership ushered in a new Parliament and a democratically elected President Mohammed Morsi in 2012. However, just as swiftly, incredibly violent protests in the spring of 2013, during which [more than 800 people were killed by Egyptian security forces](#), led to a military takeover and the toppling of both the President and the Parliament. Most recently, Interim President Adly Mansour established a new constitution, approved by referendum in early 2014, and [President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was elected to office this past May](#). A new [Parliament is scheduled to be elected during two cycles of votes in March and April](#) of this year.

Egypt's population is growing swiftly at 1.8% per year, according to 2014 estimates, bringing it to nearly 87 million inhabitants. Ninety Percent are Sunni Muslims, and according to a 2014 Pew Global Attitudes Project, [95% of Egyptians believe that homosexuality is morally unacceptable](#).

### LEGAL STATUS OF SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

Though laws do not explicitly criminalize same-sex activity, police often arrest LGBT people on charges of immorality – “debauchery,” “prostitution,” “violating religious teachings,” “violating public decency,” or as it has been called in the case of the alleged same-sex wedding, activity which is [“shameful to God” and “offensive to public morals.”](#) When being tried on charges of sodomy, many men have been subjected to humiliating and invasive medical examinations, which Human Rights Watch has documented in detail and condemned as [abusive, valueless as investigative tools, and torture](#).

### PUBLIC PERCEPTION

According to the State Department's Human Rights Report, [LGBT people in Egypt face discrimination and significant social stigma](#), exacerbated by a lack of protection by authorities. Government officials show no interest in addressing discrimination, and stigma stifles LGBT individuals' efforts to organize or publically advocate for themselves. There are few reports of violence against LGBT individuals, likely because intimidation and fear of arrest are so prevalent in Egypt that individuals feel unsafe reporting incidents.

### GOVERNMENT CENSORSHIP OF LGBT IDENTITIES

According to the State Department's Human Rights Report, a [censorship board in Egypt demanded the removal of 13 scenes from a local film](#) starring a gay-identified protagonist. The censorship board exercises severe control of all films in Egypt, though anything dealing with taboos is much more likely to face strict editing. The film, which came out last year, is one of few to openly discuss sexuality, though the numerous edits made the protagonist's same-sex relationship less obvious. Many people criticized its promotion of conversion therapy, which attempts to “cure” the protagonist of his sexual orientation. [The director stated in an interview that he believes there is a cure for homosexuality](#), that if a gay person believes he has a “disease, then he has a right to be treated.”