



# human rights *first*

June 21, 2005

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice:

I would like to express Human Rights First's appreciation of your important statements in support of democratic reforms and basic freedoms in the Middle East. In your speech on Monday at the American University in Cairo and in your subsequent public comments, you have given strong endorsement to "brave people demand[ing] their rights." Human Rights First welcomes your clear and direct endorsement of those who seek peaceful change and democratic reform.

Your comments on Egypt come at a critical moment in that country's history. As you know, for many years the Egyptian government has sought to suppress dissent and human rights advocacy by non-governmental organizations and activists, using restrictive laws and selective, politically motivated prosecutions of leading activists. These measures, which are still in use, severely limit basic freedoms of association, expression, and assembly undermining the ability of activists to push for reform or to report on human rights conditions.

As you made clear in your remarks, such restrictions in Egypt and elsewhere often lead to a climate conducive to political violence and instability. Alternatively, respect for human rights and advancement of democracy and the rule of law, are essential to stability and international security.

Human Rights First appreciates your condemnation of the imprisonment of nonviolent reformers and dissenters, whose only offense was the peaceful expression of their beliefs. As you stated in your speech, "opposition groups must be free to assemble and to participate and speak to the media," those who are peacefully petitioning for change should never be charged as criminals. We particularly welcome the emphasis you gave in your remarks to the importance of pluralism and to respect of divergent opinions. In your interview with Al-Arabiyya television you said: "It's extremely important that civil society be heard. It is not somehow anti-government or unpatriotic to hold views that are different than one's government." We trust that this openness to considering the views of long-repressed dissidents and government critics will be sustained throughout the region.

Human Rights First applauds the Administration's willingness to take a firm and specific stance on human rights and democratic reforms while addressing such an important regional ally of the United States. As you remarked, "the fear of free choices can no longer

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justify the denial of liberty. It is time to abandon the excuses that are made to avoid the hard work of democracy.” These words will reverberate around the world, and we appreciate your leadership in calling attention to serious deficiencies in human rights practices throughout the region. We look forward to the opportunity to continue a dialogue as the administration works to fulfill the promise of these important commitments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Posner". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michael Posner  
Executive Director