

Transcript of Neil Hicks Talking about the Trial of Saad Eddin Ibrahim

Hicks: What has happened to Saad is important because it is symbolic of a general trend we have seen in Egypt and throughout much of the Arab world in the last 20 years.

Saad is a man of peace; he's a democrat. He's a moderate person by anybody's standards, and yet he is somebody whose ideas have been suppressed by the government and who has been persecuted and imprisoned for his nonviolent opinions. This has happened, of course, to many thousands of political prisoners throughout the Arab world. People who want to see a better form of government, a different form of government, who have some criticism with the way their country is run, who have stood up and said we don't like what's happening here and they have found themselves prosecuted on a variety of charges.

As a result of this, the political center in Egypt and throughout the Arab world has been intimidated and silenced. So that all you are left with is the State and the political extremes, people who don't care about the law because they are already acting outside the law and they know what the consequences of their actions would be if they are detected. So the kind of political expression you see more of in societies where moderate political debate is suppressed is violent confrontation such as extremist Islamic groups, which, of course, developed in Egypt and throughout much of the Arab world in the 1970s, 1980s and through the 1990s.

This will be the third time that Saad will be tried on the same charges. What is different about these proceedings is that he has been tried by the Court of Cassation, which to date has been the appeal court, which has thrown out his previous convictions on two previous occasions.

Realistically, we have to recognize that this ordeal has taken a toll on his health. He does have this, as yet undiagnosed, degenerative neurological condition. His health has suffered. He is a much more frail man than he was before he went into prison, and the tension and stress of this prosecution, of course, has been an enormous factor in the deterioration of his health.

Hopefully he can regain his full capacities, and that will be an important factor in his future impact. And if any stain is left, if he is convicted of anything, we can be sure, I think, from the press coverage we have already seen of the case that the Egyptian press will not be kind and that he will be dragged through the mud and referred to as a convicted criminal. This, of course, will certainly damage his reputation at home. It may have less impact on his reputation abroad.

I like to think that this case is a turning point and that this is a time when the West, and the United States in particular, has realized the cost of the policies which their allies in the region have been pursuing for so long. It's very important that the Saad Ibrahims of this world be allowed to carry out their work, be allowed to build their organizations, be

allowed to be part of the political structure of their societies because they are the alternative. They are the alternative to destruction and extremism and violence. They are about building their societies, about building better societies for their own people and for us all in the world.