



# Amnesty International

## Group 524

## April 2019



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**Next Meeting: Tuesday, April 16 – 7:00 p.m. – Providence Heights**

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### Focus on Egypt

With few exceptions, recent developments in U.S. foreign policy have been overshadowed by various domestic outrages. This past week, while Donald Trump was giving aid and comfort to the brutal authoritarian regime in Egypt, it was the performance of Trump's attorney general that dominated the headlines.

This month, we have some coverage and analysis of the visit by the Egyptian leader to the White House, where he received Donald Trump's blessing. We also have a model letter in behalf of **Ezzat Ghoniem**, a human rights defender who is unjustly imprisoned in Egypt.

We also take note of the six-month anniversary of the death of **Jamal Khashoggi**, murdered by the Saudi Arabian dictatorship – another regime blessed by Donald Trump.

### April 16<sup>th</sup> at Providence Heights

At our April meeting, we will sign a note of greeting to **Supreme Patriarch Thich Quang Do**, as we did last month. His situation was described in the February newsletter, and Kathy Herbst has received nothing to indicate that things have changed. According to her Amnesty contact, representatives of Amnesty have been trying to gain permission to meet with Thich Quang Do, but they have not yet been successful.

As always, we will add our names to Amnesty petitions – including one based on this month's letter-writing opportunity – and sign messages of encouragement to prisoners of conscience.

We hope to have positive news from New Hampshire, where abolition of the death penalty seems about to happen. That update will fit in well with a recent global overview from Amnesty on death penalty developments in 2018.

We hope you can join us at the meeting!

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Amnesty International Group 524

Meeting Schedule: Third Tuesday of the month, at 7:00 p.m.

Meeting Location: Providence Heights  
9000 Babcock Blvd., Allison Park, PA 15101



Contact John Warren (jf.warren@verizon.net or 412-766-2506) for more information on material in this mailing, or visit the Amnesty USA website ([www.amnestyusa.org](http://www.amnestyusa.org)) or the website of Amnesty International Group 39 ([amnestypgh.org](http://amnestypgh.org)).

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**Action Opportunity: Model Letter in Behalf of Egyptian Human Rights Lawyer**

*On March 1 of 2018, human rights defender and lawyer **Ezzat Ghoniem** and another man named **Azzoz Mahgoub** were detained by Egyptian authorities. The original 15-day detention turned into a series of detentions that lasted for six months. In September, a court ordered their release on probation, provided that they report to a police station twice a week. Instead of being released, however, the two men were forcibly 'disappeared' by government authorities, and held incommunicado in an undisclosed location. Because they could not obey the probation reporting requirements, warrants were issued for their arrest!*

*On February 9th of this year, a judge ordered Ezzat Ghoniem into 45 days of pre-trial detention, pending investigation of charges of 'joining a banned group', 'disseminating false news', and 'providing international bodies with false information'. Azzoz Mahgoub is still being held incommunicado.*

Mr. Nabil Sadek  
Public Prosecutor  
Office of the Public Prosecutor  
Dar alQadaal-Ali  
Downtown Cairo  
Arab Republic of Egypt

Dear Counsellor:

I urge you to bring about the immediate and unconditional release of **Ezzat Ghoniem**, who has been detained without trial since March 1, 2018. I also urge you to reveal the condition and whereabouts of **Azzoz Mahgoub**, who has also been detained since March 1, 2018.

I believe that these men have been detained solely for their peaceful human rights work, which is an exercise of their right to freedom of expression. Any and all charges against these two men should be dropped.

During any interval prior to their release, Ghoniem and Mahgoub must be protected from torture and other ill-treatment, under conditions of detention that are in line with international standards.

A prompt, independent, effective, and impartial investigation should be conducted into the circumstances surrounding their detention and subsequent enforced disappearance. Findings of that investigation must be made public, and individuals responsible for violating the rights of the detainees should be brought to justice in fair trials.

cc: Ambassador Yasser Reda  
Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt  
3521 International Court NW  
Washington DC 20008

**Egypt: Trump Endorses Flagrant Abuser of Human Rights**

*On Tuesday, April 9<sup>th</sup>, this headline and photograph appeared on the New York Times website.*

***Egypt's President, Hoping to Be  
Allowed to Stay in Office Until  
2034, Basks in Trump's Embrace***



The meeting on Tuesday was President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's second White House invitation from President Trump, who has established a rapport with him. Tom Brenner for The New York Times

*The accompanying article, by Mark Landler, describes this event in the context of Trump's relationships with a corrupt hard-line leader in Israel and a murderous dictator in Saudi Arabia. We have the first few paragraphs below and on the next page. You can find the full article here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/09/us/politics/trump-abdel-fattah-el-sisi.html>*

WASHINGTON — President Trump welcomed Egypt's president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, to the White House on Tuesday, and bestowed on his ally what he most eagerly sought: a ringing endorsement of his strongman rule.

Mr. el-Sisi, 64, a former general who took power in a military coup in 2013, is seeking to amend the Egyptian Constitution to allow him to run for two more six-year terms, which would keep him in power until 2034.

### **Egypt: Trump Endorses Flagrant Abuser of Human Rights (continued)**

When Mr. Trump was asked about the amendments, he professed not to know anything about them, but declared: “I can just tell you he’s doing a great job. Great president.”

Mr. el-Sisi’s visit came on the same day that another key ally of Mr. Trump’s in the Middle East, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, was facing voters in a tight election. In the weeks leading up to that vote, the president tried to shore up Mr. Netanyahu’s fortunes with a series of gestures, chief among them American recognition of Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

It also came as Mr. Trump called a third ally, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, who has been under a cloud since reports that he ordered the killing in October of a Saudi dissident journalist, Jamal Khashoggi.

Mr. Trump and Prince Mohammed discussed Saudi Arabia’s “critical role” in stabilizing the region, the campaign to isolate Iran, and “the importance of human rights issues,” according to a White House statement.

For Egypt’s leader, Mr. Trump offered only the trappings of an Oval Office welcome, though one with flashing cameras and looming boom mics. Back home, where Mr. el-Sisi has methodically stifled dissent and tightened his grip on power, that could prove more than enough validation.

“The single and only reason for President Sisi to visit the White House right now is to obtain a strong endorsement from President Trump to stay in power,” said Amy Hawthorne, the deputy director of research at the Project on Middle East Democracy. “He has calculated that he can intimidate his opponents and potential opponents with a show of support from Trump.”

Before their session, Mr. Trump said the two men would discuss trade and counterterrorism. He said nothing publicly about Egypt’s human rights record, which was always checkered but has deteriorated under Mr. el-Sisi, who has brutally suppressed the Muslim Brotherhood and turned Egypt into a society in which a person can be arrested over an objectionable Facebook post. Mr. Trump’s daughter Ivanka also met with Mr. el-Sisi to discuss the empowerment of women.

*From later in the article, it seems likely that the constitutional amendments will become law:*

Analysts said Mr. el-Sisi’s constitutional amendments, which also include a provision that would expand the military’s role, have drawn no public enthusiasm. But the electoral system is set up so that they can prevail with a simple majority, even if voter turnout is low.

To coincide with Mr. Sisi’s visit, his critics began an online petition on Tuesday to oppose the amendments. The website was quickly blocked inside Egypt; the government has previously blocked several other independent or critical websites or online publications. But the petition remained accessible outside Egypt and the website counter indicated that more than 67,000 people had endorsed it — a number that could not be confirmed. Egypt has permitted almost no public criticism of the proposals or organizing against them, but street signs urging a “yes” vote are common in Cairo.



## **Indiana State University: Remembering Jamal Khashoggi**

*In 1983, Jamal Khashoggi graduated from Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana. Shortly after he was murdered last October, the university established an event in his memory, the Jamal Khashoggi Annual Address on Journalism and the Media.*

*To mark the six-month anniversary of his death, the inaugural program in the annual series took place this past week. The speaker was Khashoggi's longtime friend and colleague at the Washington Post, David Ignatius. In its write-up about the event, the university's press office took particular note of the fact that four days earlier Ignatius had spoken to another group of aspiring journalism students – in Cairo. The program took place on the same day that Trump welcomed the authoritarian leader of Egypt to the White House.*

## **Washington Post Journalist Pays Tribute to his Colleague and Friend**

When *Washington Post* foreign affairs columnist David Ignatius spoke to Indiana State University students Tuesday afternoon, it was his second of such chats with aspiring journalists in four days.

The earlier conversation was in Cairo, and the contrast between the two events could not have been more clear in Ignatius' mind.

“The center of our conversation was what does the death of Jamal Khashoggi and what does the lack of press freedom in Egypt – in Saudi Arabia, in China, in Russia, go down the list – what does that mean to young people who want to be journalists, who want to do our work and face terrible risks?” Ignatius said.

“As one of the deans at American University in Cairo said, ‘We want them to be free (to tell the truth), but we don't want them to go to jail,’” Ignatius said. “It's a reality check to go out in the world and talk to people who are doing my job. Literally every day they write something controversial, they are at risk.”

Ignatius visited Indiana State on the sixth-month anniversary of the disappearance and death of his friend, colleague and ISU alumnus. His relaxed, informal discussion with a dozen Sycamores preceded his public address as the inaugural speaker in the Jamal Khashoggi Annual Address on Journalism and the Media on Tuesday evening.

A graduate of Harvard and Cambridge, Ignatius has published a twice-weekly award-winning column for the *Washington Post* for more than 15 years. Also a bestselling fiction writer, Ignatius has turned his experiences with the CIA into 10 spy novels.

Khashoggi earned a business administration degree from Indiana State in 1983.

“Jamal Khashoggi's death is personal for us at the *Washington Post*,” Ignatius told students. “He was our colleague – we loved having him in the office – and he was my friend for the past 15 years. He was somebody who I knew well. I made a promise to myself, as did many of my colleagues when we learned of his death, that we wouldn't just let this go.”



### **Indiana State University: Remembering Jamal Khashoggi (continued)**

Ignatius asked students what they – as future ISU alumni and as aspiring journalists – thought about Khashoggi, and what was the reaction on campus. Andrew Hile, president of the ISU student chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists, said they talked about it in class and were inspired to memorialize Khashoggi.

“We wanted to get the ball rolling (to honor him),” Hile said.

Ignatius has written extensively about Khashoggi’s death and the international political fallout. Students asked Ignatius what he thought Khashoggi’s legacy will be.

“One thing that would amaze Jamal would be what a difference his death made. In many ways, he was a shy person. He was not a guy who loved to go on television,” Ignatius said.

“The idea that his death would have this galvanizing effect, that people here in Terre Haute would dedicate lectures to him, would have special meaning to him.”

With the risks abroad and recent criticism of American media, Ignatius asked if they had concerns about pursuing a career in journalism. “Asking the tough questions is what makes the profession worthwhile,” said Garrett Short.

Ignatius told students he has concerns about the future of journalism. A business model favoring stories that attract the most web traffic presents the risk of further polarizing mainstream outlets.

“The idea that we’re not there to challenge people’s assumptions, as opposed to reinforcing them, really concerns me,” Ignatius said. “It’s more important than ever for journalists to write about items of importance – no matter the web analytics – rather than ‘throwing red meat’ to feed base audiences. When you think about journalism as a career, find an outlet that will resist that,” he said.

Khashoggi’s legacy stands as inspiration to tell the truth, no matter the risks. “The fact about Jamal is he was someone who just could not stop himself from telling the truth. He knew the risks he was taking. It’s not like he just walked into that consulate with no idea. He thought about giving it up, and he just couldn’t do it. He was a courageous truth-teller,” Ignatius said.

“He was passionate about the work he did. He loved being at the *Washington Post*, because his voice was amplified and he had the power to reach people around the world. When he would come to our newsroom and walk around, he was like a kid with a big smile on his face – there were three floors with journalists all working to do this work that he loved.”