



A speech by
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Statement for the Record
Congressman Joseph R. Pitts
Deportation Case of Mr. Sameh Khouzam
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Mr. Speaker, I am deeply concerned about the upcoming possible deportation of Mr. Sameh Khouzam, an Egyptian man who is currently detained in York, Pennsylvania. The Second Circuit Court granted a stay of deportation to Egypt based on a finding that it was “more likely than not” that he would be tortured upon return. Reportedly, the U.S. Government received assurances from the Egyptian Government that Mr. Khouzam would not be tortured were he to be returned to Egypt. I am deeply disturbed that the U.S. Government appears to have taken this assurance at face value in light of the extensive evidence of torture against Egyptian citizens, particularly against religious minorities

Mr. Khouzam fled Egypt in 1998, due to pressure from the Egyptian government to forcibly change his religion. Reports suggest that he, and other family members, were detained and imprisoned by the government during these reported attempts at forcible conversion. Mr. Khouzam then fled the country fearing for his life. During the flight to the United States, Egyptian officials notified U.S. officials that Mr. Khouzam was wanted for murder. When he landed in the U.S., authorities noticed that he was injured (due to Egyptian security officials’ actions) and placed him in the hospital. After his release from the hospital, he was imprisoned in the U.S. due to Egyptian government requests, despite the absence of credible evidence and the lack of autopsy reports substantiating the “murder” charges. Mr. Khouzam was imprisoned in the U.S. for eight years, until he was granted parole based on a Second Circuit Court decision that were he to be deported he would most certainly face torture at the hands of the Egyptian Government.

By all accounts, Mr. Khouzam is an upstanding, contributing member of the communities in which he works, lives, and worships in Pennsylvania. It came as a great surprise to everyone when Mr. Khouzam, following instructions, voluntarily reported to immigration authorities to check in with them on Tuesday, May 29, 2007, but was then detained, imprisoned, and informed that the Egyptian Government provided “assurances” that he would not be tortured, therefore, he would be deported on Friday, June 1, 2007. Mr. Khouzam’s lawyers requested an extension of the stay of deportation; the request was granted for an extension until Thursday, June 7, 2007 and extended again until Monday, June 18, 2007.

It is deeply disturbing that the U.S. Department of State and Department of Homeland Security would, in the face of all evidence to the contrary, accept at face value a promise from the Egyptian Government. Over the years, a number of Members of Congress have personally worked on numerous cases in Egypt in which the government has used torture against its own citizens. The most recent *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* issued by the U.S. Department of State detail that there were “numerous, credible reports that security forces tortured and mistreated prisoners and detainees,” that security forces “employ torture to extract information or force confessions,” and that “human rights monitors believe the use of torture by police [is] widespread.” Further, the *Country Reports* describe the torture methods used by Egyptian security officials, “Principal methods of torture reportedly employed by the police and

the SSIS included stripping and blindfolding victims; suspending victims from a ceiling or doorframe with feet just touching the floor; beating victims with fists, whips, metal rods, or other objects; using electrical shocks; and dousing victims with cold water. Victims frequently reported being subjected to threats and forced to sign blank papers for use against themselves or their families should they in the future lodge complaints about the torture. Some victims, including male and female detainees and children, reported sexual assaults or threats of rape against themselves or family members.” Even further, the *Report* states that “Security forces continued to mistreat and torture prisoners, arbitrarily arrest and detain persons, hold detainees in prolonged pretrial detention, and engage in mass arrests.”

Further, the State Department, as have numerous human rights organizations, has documented persecution by the government of Egypt against Coptic Christians. All this evidence and the clear patterns of the use of torture as well as persecution against religious minorities indicate that the “assurances” of the Egyptian Government on these matters are *not* reliable.

Mr. Speaker, in two recent news programs on an Australian television station, former Central Intelligence official Bob Baer made it clear that the U.S. Government knows of the widespread torture in Egypt, and, in fact, considers that knowledge in decisions to send individuals to Egypt. When asked if there was any doubt someone would be tortured if he were returned to Egypt, Mr. Baer answered, **“Oh absolutely no doubt at all ... [if you] send them to Egypt it might as well, it’s tantamount to condemning them to death.”** In another part of the program, Mr. Baer stated, regarding sending people overseas, “If you never want to hear from them again, send them to Egypt. That’s pretty much the rule.” When again asked, “When someone’s rendered to Egypt, is there any doubt that they’re going to be tortured?” Mr. Baer said, “Oh absolutely no doubt at all.”

Yet, the U.S. Government is willing to accept the “diplomatic assurances” of the Egyptian Government that Mr. Sameh Khouzam, who has already been tortured by the Egyptians, will *not* be tortured if he were to be deported. Our country was founded upon due process, not sending individuals to countries where the likelihood of their being tortured is extremely high, diplomatic assurances to the contrary.

On June 1, 2007, in the *Government’s Response to the Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus and Opposition to Petitioner’s Motion for Stay of Removal*, the U.S. Government told the Court that “substantial embarrassment could result in the diplomatic community” if the Court were to find that Mr. Khouzam would likely be tortured despite assurances from high level Egyptian officials. Since when have we based our foreign and domestic policy on concerns about being embarrassed?

We know the Egyptian government tortures people. What does the U.S. Government want from Egypt in exchange for deporting a Coptic Christian who is reportedly innocent of any charges against him?

Mr. Speaker, if Mr. Khouzam is sent back to Egypt, this Administration will bear ultimate responsibility for anything that happens to him.