

Middle East–North Africa: LGBT Activists Under Pressure

OFFICE OF NORTH AFRICA, ARABIAN PENINSULA, AND REGIONAL ANALYSIS

The tough stance taken against the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community by governments in the Middle East and North Africa probably is driven by conservative public opinion and domestic political competition from Islamists, and is hindering US initiatives in support of LGBT rights. Negative perceptions of LGBT individuals are widespread for cultural and religious reasons; LGBT activists report that since 2011 their community in the region has come under increased scrutiny by governments and has been targeted by militias in Iraq and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Syria, according to a body of regional and Western press and NGO reporting. ¹²³⁴⁵⁶⁷⁸⁹¹⁰¹¹

- Egyptian and Tunisian activists report a growing crackdown against LGBT individuals since 2011, according to [redacted] NGOs, and press reporting. ¹²¹³¹⁴¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷¹⁸¹⁹²⁰²¹²²²³²⁴²⁵ Last month the Egyptian Government arrested but later acquitted 26 men on charges of indecency and debauchery after a highly publicized raid on a Cairo bath house, according to [redacted] press reports. ²⁶²⁷²⁸²⁹³⁰³¹³²³³³⁴³⁵³⁶³⁷ In 2013 the Tunisian Government sentenced the leader of the Tunisian Liberal Party to three months in jail for sodomy, according to NGO reporting. ³⁸
- [redacted] Activists and advocates of LGBT issues in the region [redacted] in November 2014 that they face risks to their physical security. ³⁹⁴⁰⁴¹⁴² LGBT individuals in the region face routine harassment and discrimination in medical care, housing, education, and employment, according to a body of regional and Western press reports, and NGO reporting. ⁴³⁴⁴⁴⁵⁴⁶⁴⁷⁴⁸⁴⁹⁵⁰⁵¹⁵²⁵³⁵⁴⁵⁵⁵⁶⁵⁷
- ([redacted] Egyptian and Lebanese police as of August 2014 were using mobile apps and social media sites to arrest gay men, according to NGO and Western press reports. ⁵⁸⁵⁹ Western press reports since last September have noted that Egyptian police were using a US-based gay dating website to entrap users. ⁶⁰⁶¹

Regional governments targeting groups and individuals advocating LGBT rights almost certainly will portray international efforts to advance such rights as foreign meddling, undercutting US policies to protect LGBT individuals. The head of Egypt's diplomatic mission to the UN opined in September 2014 that the UN's adoption of a resolution related to sexual orientation and gender identity was a form of cultural imperialism that could hurt international cooperation on human rights, according to a regional press report. ⁶²

- (U [REDACTED] Saudi Arabia responded to the UN resolution by saying it is necessary to respect cultural specificities in certain countries and that the Gulf Cooperation Council opposed countries imposing their culture upon them.⁶³

[REDACTED] Progress in mitigating human rights abuses against LGBT individuals in the Middle East and North Africa almost certainly depends on engaging governments in the region on their legal frameworks—15 out of 18 Middle Eastern countries criminalize same-sex acts—and influencing societal tolerance for the community's rights. Discreet international support could help avoid drawing undue attention and possibly counterproductive backlash against activists.

- [REDACTED] Egyptian civil society organizations—already vulnerable to government scrutiny—have warned US officials that overt engagement puts them at risk, according to [REDACTED] a Lebanese activist in May 2014 stated that public outreach by the US would be counterproductive, [REDACTED].⁶⁵
- [REDACTED] Training and funding for lawyers who defend LGBT rights could bolster the legal capacities of local advocacy groups. A rapid response legal fund to support LGBT individuals subject to legal proceedings would probably be well received by some in the community based on conversations with Egyptian human rights activists, according to [REDACTED].
- [REDACTED] Tarek Zeidan, a prominent member of Helem, the first LGBT rights organization in the region,⁶⁷ stressed last year that the LGBT community would benefit from community engagement with local police forces and the Ministry of Interior to limit the targeting of LGBT individuals, [REDACTED].⁶⁸
- [REDACTED] Supporting gender studies in academic institutions in the Middle East and North Africa may offer an opportunity for US engagement on LGBT issues because this academic field often explores diversity of identity in society. Earlier this year, LGBT individuals requested US help creating an academic program on LGBT issues in Lebanon, [REDACTED].⁶⁹

[REDACTED] For additional information, please see the WIRE, [REDACTED] [Global: Opportunities To Improve LGBT Human Rights Protections](#), 22 March 2014, and the Intelligence Assessment, [REDACTED] [UN: Bolstering Initiatives on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#), 15 June 2011.

¹ [Internet Site | MSMGF-The Global Forum on MSM & HIV | NGOs Deplore Arrest of "Gay" Men in Beirut | August 13 2014 | | <http://www.hivos.nl> | November 2014 |]

² [Online Publication | Aaron Magid | Al-Monitor | Little protection for gays in Jordan | August 12 2014 | | <http://www.al-monitor.com> | November 2014 |]

³ [Internet Site | Mona Alami | Interpress News Agency | Jordan's LGBT Community Fears Greater Intolerance | August 31 2014 | | <http://www.ipsnews.net> | November 2014 |]

⁴ [Online Publication | Michael K. Lavers | Washington Blade | LGBT Iraqis Face Imminent Risk of Death Under Islamic State | 19 November 2014 | | www.washingtonblade.com | 11/2014 |]

⁵ [Internet Site | International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission and MADRE | When Coming Out is a Death Sentence: Persecution of LGBT Iraqis | 2014 | | <http://www.huffingtonpost.com> | 11/2014 |]

⁶ [Online Publication | Michael K. Lavers | Washington Blade | LGBT Iraqis Face Imminent Risk of Death Under Islamic State | 19 November 2014 | | www.washingtonblade.com | 11/2014 |]

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⁸ [Internet Site | Alessandria Masi | International Business Times | ISIS Executes Two Men For Being Gay By Stoning Them in Deir Ezzor | 25 November 2014 | | <http://www.ibtimes.com> | 11/2014 |]

⁹ [Internet Site | Haaretz | ISIS Executes Two Men Suspected of Being Gay | 26 November 2014 | | <http://www.haaretz.com> | 11/2014 |]

¹⁰ [Online Publication | Human Rights Campaign Foundation and Human Rights First | Report: The State of Human Rights for LGBT People in Africa | July 2014 | | www.humanrightsfirst.org | November 2014 |]

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¹³ [Internet Site | Daily Beast | Sisi Is Persecuting, Prosecuting, and Publicly Shaming Egypt's Gays 2014 | 30 December 2014 | | <http://www.dailybeast.com> | 2014 |]

¹⁴ [Redacted]

¹⁵ [Internet Site | A Paper Bird | Brutal Gender Crackdown in Egypt: The Tomorrows That Never Came | May 18 2014 | | <http://www.paper-bird-net> | November 2014 |]

¹⁶ [Internet Site | Freedom House--Egypt | Freedom in the World 2014 | 2014 | | <http://www.freedomhouse.org> | November 2014 |]

¹⁷ [Internet Site | Graeme Reid | Human Rights Watch | 7 Held for Alleged Homosexual Conduct | September 09 2014 | | <http://www.hrw.org> | November 2014 |]

¹⁸ [Internet Site | Sonia Farid | al-Arabiya News | Egypt Homosexual "wedding" video stirs debate | September 20 2014 | | <http://www.alarabiya.net> | November 2014 |]

¹⁹ [GANNETT NEWS SERVICE | GNS2014 | GUIDE ID: 1002/22e8afe5-713f-4a1c-b090-751fad195855 | 9 October 2014 | | (U) Gays, lesbians fear renewed backlash in Middle East | | (U) | (U) |]

²⁰ [INDEPENDENT.CO.UK | INPDWB2014 | GUIDE ID: 1002/0771191f-0317-444d-bd4a-5effd6badd67 | 26 September 2014 | | (U) Grindr urges LGBT community to hide their identities as Egypt persecutes nation's gay community - Six were sentenced in Egypt yesterday after posting on Facebook | | (U) | (U) |]

²¹ [REDACTED]

²² [Online Publication | | Human Rights Campaign Foundation and Human Rights First | Report: The State of Human Rights for LGBT People in Africa | July 2014 | | www.humanrightsfirst.org | November 2014 |]

²³ [REDACTED]

²⁴ [Internet Site | Hunter Walker | Reuters | | November 1 2014 | | http://www.reuters.com | November 2014 |]

²⁵ [Online Publication | | The Daily Beast | Al-Sisi's Egypt Is Worse For Gays Than The Muslim Brotherhood | June 28 2014 | | www.dailybeast.com | November 2014 |]

²⁶ [REDACTED]

²⁷ [REDACTED]

²⁸ [Newspaper | | The New York Times | Egypt's Appalling Crackdown on Gays | 06 January 2015 | | | 06 January 2015 |]

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³¹ [Internet Site | | Daily Beast | Sisi Is Persecuting, Prosecuting, and Publicly Shaming Egypt's Gays 2014 | 30 December 2014 | | http://www.dailybeast.com | 2014 |]

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³³ [Ahram Online | IMR2015011248312287 | GUIDE ID: 1002/5f0747d2-29ee-4c98-9525-a45208ef9927 | 12 January 2015 | | (U) Court acquits 26 men in 'gay bathhouse' case | | (U) | (U) |]

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³⁵ [The Associated Press | guide://1002/9f1fdcc2-505e-4910-9ef6-6e4ddd0429ee | GUIDE ID: 1002/9f1fdcc2-505e-4910-9ef6-6e4ddd0429ee | null | | (U) Mideast Egypt Gay Trial | | (U) | (U) |]

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³⁷ [DOW JONES INSTITUTIONAL NEWS | dnco20150112002164 | GUIDE ID: 1002/a1ffb8d1-026e-49d2-bb03-4170d1d414c2 | 12 January 2015 | | (U) Egypt Acquits Men in Gay Raid Trial -- Update | | (U) | (U) |]

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⁴⁴ [Internet Site | IRIN News | Egypt: HIV-Positive People Battle Health Service Discrimination | August 31 2011 | | <http://www.irinnews.org> | 11/2014 |]

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⁴⁶ [Internet Site | Mona Alami | Interpress Service News Agency | The Darker Side for Gays in Lebanon | 24 August 2014 | | <http://www.ips.net> | November 2014 |]

⁴⁷ [Internet Site | MSMGF-The Global Forum on MSM & HIV | NGOs Deplore Arrest of "Gay" Men in Beirut | August 13 2014 | | <http://www.hivos.nl> | November 2014 |]

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⁵³ [Internet Site | International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission and MADRE | When Coming Out is a Death Sentence: Persecution of LGBT Iraqis | 2014 | | <http://www.huffingtonpost.com> | 11/2014 |]

⁵⁴ [Internet Site | Alessandra Masi | International Business Times | ISIS Executes Two Men For Being Gay By Stoning Them in Deir Ezzor | 25 November 2014 | | <http://www.ibtimes.com> | 11/2014 |]

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⁵⁹ [Internet Site | James Longmann | BBC News | Gay Community Hit Hard by Middle East Turmoil | October 29 2014 | | <http://www.bbc.co.uk> | November 2014 |]

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