

"Gravely Concerned That Egypt's Democracy Has Faltered," Jimmy Carter

May 18, 2014

The Carter Center is concerned about the restrictive political and legal context surrounding Egypt's electoral process, the lack of a genuinely competitive campaign environment, and the deep political polarization that threatens the country's transition as May 26-27 presidential elections quickly approach.

Although a significant part of the Egyptian population appears to support the military-backed transition, the period following the July 2013 ouster of President Mohamed Morsi has been marked by severe and escalating political conflict, polarization, and the failure to advance national reconciliation. In addition to the oppression and exclusion of the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters, there has been a crackdown on opposition and media across the political spectrum and expanding limitations on fundamental political freedoms of association, expression, and peaceful assembly. There also has been a sharp rise in the incidence of militant attacks against the military and police. While a new constitution was approved in January 2014, the document itself was drafted quickly and without an inclusive process, failing to build broad consensus on a shared vision for a democratic society.

As a result, Egypt's political transition has stalled and stands on the precipice of total reversal. While it is important for Egypt's leaders to improve the political climate before the presidential elections, the immediate post-election environment will be even more critical if Egypt's transition is to result in a democratic outcome. The new president will hold not only executive authority, but also sole legislative powers until a new parliament is elected, thus greatly strengthening the president's ability to shape the course of political events.

"I am gravely concerned that Egypt's democratic transition has faltered. Egypt's next president should take immediate steps to foster dialogue and political accommodation to ensure that the full spectrum of Egyptian society can participate meaningfully in politics," said former U.S. President Jimmy Carter. "Constitutional reforms, based on inclusive dialogue and consensus-building efforts, also would help to create a shared vision for Egyptian society. These and other steps forward will be possible only if all Egyptians renounce violence and commit to peaceful political dialogue and reconciliation."

The Carter Center deployed a small expert mission to assess the political and legal context surrounding the May 2014 presidential electoral process. Based on the mission's analysis, and in a spirit of respect and support, The Carter Center recommends the following steps to open political space before the presidential elections and to advance political accommodation in the post-election period ahead of parliamentary elections:

- End the government crackdown on peaceful dissenting forces, including the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters as well as opposition activists and movements such as the April 6th movement and others. (
- Immediately rescind the Protest Law, which severely restricts public gatherings and rallies, including for electoral campaigning, and release persons imprisoned under the law. Ensure key rights of the accused, including the right to a fair trial.(
- Ease restrictions on media outlets to enable a more open political debate during the electoral process. Going forward, put in place a media code of ethics.(
- Ensure that the forthcoming parliamentary election law is developed with broad political inclusion, protects core political rights enshrined in the constitution, and serves to promote strong parties and a vibrant legislative branch.(
- Pursue dialogue and national reconciliation efforts, including independent judicial investigation into wrongful deaths and allegations of torture.
- Consider new constitutional amendments to ensure protection of core human rights and political freedoms. (
- Ensure maximum access for elections observers throughout the rest of the presidential election process, including during the aggregation of results.(
- Establish new regulations on election observation for future elections to ensure that observer groups, especially national citizen observers, can be accredited early enough to assess and have adequate access to the entire electoral process.

The Carter

Center has observed most of Egypt's recent electoral processes, including the 2011-2012 parliamentary elections and the 2012 presidential elections. For the recent constitutional referendum process and the upcoming presidential elections, the Center deployed smaller expert missions focusing on the broader legal and political context on the transition.

The Center's expert mission for the May 26-27 presidential elections requested and the Presidential Election Commission approved accreditations for 10 people to carry out this work. Given its size, the Center's limited mission will not deploy to observe election day procedures. The Carter Center's electoral assessment and observation activities around the world are implemented in accordance with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, which establishes guidelines for professional and impartial election observation.

