



MONA MAKRAM EBEID

Egyptian Senator and Member of the Senate Constitutional Committee

Thierry de MONTBRIAL, Founder and Chairman of the WPC

I now give the floor to Mona, who will also save the honour of the French language by speaking in French. Egypt has also been in the foreground of tragedies. Today, no one tries to deny that the Russian plane explosion was a terrorist attack. Egypt is in even worse economic straits. It is being propped up by Saudi Arabia, which is in financial trouble itself. This is just one example of all the tragedies in the Middle East.

Mona MAKRAM EBEID, Egyptian Senator and Member of the Senate Constitutional Committee

Thank you for inviting me, Thierry.

I would like to start by expressing my condolences to the French people. We in Egypt also put the French flag on the pyramids, which is a first. And I must thank you for being in Montreux, because Montreux is a historic city for us. This is where the Montreux Convention was signed, abolishing the extraterritorial legal system for foreigners in Egypt, which marked the start of Egypt's independence.

Let us get back to what you just said. In the skies above the Sinai, in Beirut and in Paris, we have seen that ISIS has struck beyond its borders. That is the new strategy. It is no longer based on a single country or entity, but transnational. As soon as President Sisi took office, he warned the entire international community by recalling that we are facing a transnational threat seeking a global reach. As we have seen in the past two weeks, we are not the only ones who have come under attack.

Obviously, I would like to speak a little bit about Egypt. Egypt is facing extraordinary challenges, both at home and abroad.

The main question and challenge in Egypt today is how the government can effectively counter terrorism without threatening civil liberties. What reforms are needed to make Egypt's security sector effective, accountable and in line with international human rights? How can the international community play an effective role in encouraging and facilitating the reform efforts instead of accusing Egypt of oppressive measures – that France has adopted, by the way, in the last two days – when you have people threatening you daily in the Sinai, not only attacking civilians but the army and the police who are trying to safeguard the borders of Egypt?

Until now the government has struggled to find an appropriate response to counter the threat of terrorism and faced significant challenges both inside and outside as the country faces major terrorist attacks that have negatively affected the country's security and economic stability. However, as you have said, we will get over that, and Sharm el-Sheikh was bruised by the Sinai jet crash of a Russian plane, which unfortunately prompted many countries to suspend flights to the resort, whereas tourism is a main source of income.

We know that there is a protracted regional conflict, and it will not be solved tomorrow. The international community should give the region the tools to enable it to solve some of the problems it faces today, including unemployment and education. I was pleased that the President of Switzerland focused so much on educational training, and that is what we need. That is what the international community must do today, to try to find out what are the roots of this frustration today. Young people, as you said, would love to be able to enjoy their lives, and today prefer to be martyrs for the sake of God, for the sake of Allah. I want to remind you that the first to speak about the need to reform the Islamic discourse, the religious discourse, was President Sisi, and he did it in the midst of the highest authority in Islam. We should not forget that, because it is a very courageous move, and that is why he is the target of the Islamists, or Daesh, regardless of how you name them.

We want this man to succeed. We know that there are many obstacles and many reservations we have when considering human rights, freedom of expression, or whatever, but it is not the time for that now. It is now time to support a man who has popularity, who, when he came to open the second line of the Suez Canal, managed to get USD 64 billion from the Egyptian people in less than eight days. This proves the credibility and support that he has among the Egyptian people.

Therefore, to say that this is a military regime, resulting from a military coup, will get us nowhere. It is better to listen to the people. The people want him to succeed. The people know that he has risked his life to end a theocratic government which wanted to keep women at home, to bring back genital mutilation and marriage of young girls at the age of nine, and so on. Please try to see what is happening more objectively; if Egypt falls, the whole region falls, and I am not saying this as an Egyptian but as an Arab. This is what I am told whenever I go to any Arab country, that they want us to succeed. We will succeed, and I know we will. However, it takes time, and not just five or ten years.

Another thing is that we are in the midst of parliamentary elections, which is the third phase of the roadmap that he has established, and in the new constitution we are more in favour of women and of Christians, something that has never happened before. He made a point in his discourse about the reform of Islam when coming from the plane from Kuwait to go to the Coptic cathedral on Christmas day. That was the first time an Egyptian president has done so.

Try to see the positive aspects. We know that there are negative aspects, but try to see the positive aspects. He has a population of 90 million, and we have all our army in the Sinai today trying to protect the Egyptian borders. Therefore, the Western press in particular should try to be more objective and to see things as they are.

Thierry de MONTBRIAL, Founder and Chairman of the WPC

Thank you, Mona, and I would like to emphasise one point you made about Sisi's speech in al-Azhar University, in December last year, I think. It was a very courageous speech, as you said; he pointed his finger at the Rector of the University and said that this was not what Islam was about. There was not a single report in the western press on this event; it was not even mentioned.