

REGENI CASE, BONINO WRITES TO MACRON: "BECAUSE TODAY WE ARE EMBARRASSED BY THE LEGION OF HONOUR AS WE ARE BY AL SISI".

by Emma Bonino (Senator of the Italian Republic; Member of PGA)

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This letter was translated into English by No Peace Without Justice (the NGO founded by Emma Bonino)

Dear President,

the awarding of the Legion of Honour to the President of the Egyptian Republic, Al Sisi, has aroused in me and throughout my country great shock and deep indignation. You are perfectly familiar with the entire case involving our fellow citizen Giulio Regeni, who was arrested on 26 January 2016 and brutally tortured for nine days until his murder, as has been proven by a judicial enquiry conducted by the Rome Public Prosecutor's Office. On the other hand, you cannot ignore the Egyptian situation in which the same fate was reserved for over a thousand Regeni, who suffered the same fate as the young Italian, disappearing in the regime's prisons, many of them without charge or trial.

I do not know the reasons for awarding this honour. But whatever they may be, in view of this situation and the responsibilities of the Egyptian President and his government, they are unacceptable. I know perfectly well that France, like Italy and other European and non-European countries, has important economic, commercial and geostrategic balance interests to safeguard in its relations with Egypt, but there must also be a limit to the considerations of realpolitik. And on the part of a country like France, which at the end of the eighteenth century gave the world the first declaration of human rights, respect for human rights and their universality should be taken into account at least in the same way as economic and geopolitical interests.

I am not among those who wish for diplomatic ruptures or other tensions. I cherish relations with France and believe that the path of dialogue is preferable. I would have preferred the institutions of the Italian State to have made themselves interpreters of this. While waiting for them to intervene, I address you in my capacity as Senator of the Italian Republic and, if you will allow me, as a European citizen.

I am perfectly aware that Egypt is not the only country to commit these crimes against fundamental human rights. Many other countries are guilty of such violations and, even in Europe, we know how difficult it is to enforce the principles of the rule of law, which are currently being challenged by at least two of the European Union's partners. This is precisely why I believe that in all circumstances we should not refrain from demanding that the governments of these countries respect human rights and condemn their violation, especially when it results in the murder of an innocent person and in any case of a person who would have been entitled to a public arrest and a fair trial. All the more reason why we should refrain from honouring and awarding high honours to Heads of State.

In 2009 I was awarded the Legion of Honour. I was as honoured as I am today embarrassed to be in such company. Other Italian friends and colleagues are returning their award these past few days as an important symbolic gesture, not out of malice towards French citizens, but to underline a mistake that we believe you have made and that we ask you to make amends for in the ways you consider appropriate, starting with greater cooperation in investigating these violations wherever they are committed, including in our countries.

I am deeply convinced that impunity fosters cruelty. Italy and France were together in the creation of the International Criminal Court and the tribunal for crimes against humanity committed in the former Yugoslavia and for the adoption of the convention against torture, which Egypt also supported.

We must move forward, Mr. President, on this difficult path and not turn backwards by "honouring" those who bear the greatest responsibility for violations of international law.