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To all MEP signatories of the letter of 16 August  
European Parliament  
Rue Wiertz 60  
1047 Brussels

Dear Members of the European Parliament,

Thank you for your letter of 16 August, in which you raise concerns about the use of military trials against civilians by the Egyptian transitional military authorities – the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).

Events in Egypt since the ousting of former President Mubarak on 11 February show the challenges that the democratic transition faces. Building deep democracy is indeed a long term effort, with no quick fixes, and I agree with you that the EU has to continuously remind our partners how essential it is to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including through the establishment of the rule of law and an independent judiciary.

The systematic use of military trials, which in many cases included protestors, activists and bloggers, was unacceptable. The right to a fair trial is a basic human right. Civil courts should provide a competent, independent and impartial body to address proceedings against civilians. Therefore, I expressed serious concern regarding the excessive use of military trials of civilians in all my discussions with the interim military council and government. I also issued public statements to that effect, with the EU's Delegation in Cairo making further demarches on this issue.

As a result of both international and domestic pressure, the interim authorities at last decided on 15 September to stop referring civilians to military courts – a fundamental and necessary step to restore faith in the democratic process.

Please rest assured that the EU, and I personally, will continue our close dialogue with Egypt, paving the way towards a well-deserved democratic future for the Egyptian people.

Yours sincerely,



Catherine Ashton