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**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT
FOR THE 48TH SESSION OF THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

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Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Arab Republic of Egypt (Egypt).

Background

2. Egypt is a country located in North Africa with a population of approximately 106.6 million people.¹ The country is predominantly Muslim, with approximately 90% of the population identifying as Muslim and 10% as Coptic Christians.² In its 2024 World Watch List, Open Doors ranked Egypt as the 38th worst place for Christians.³ In Egypt, Christians have been arrested as a result of blasphemy laws, and extremists have attacked and harassed Christians to force them out of their communities.⁴ Further, Christians have difficulty building churches, and converts are unable to register as Christians on their ID cards.⁵

3. Egypt's last review was held on November 13, 2019.⁶ As a result of the review, Egypt received 372 recommendations, 294 of which it supported.⁷ It was recommended by Malta, and supported by Egypt, that the government “[c]ontinue efforts aimed at ensuring respect for freedom of religion or belief in law and in practice, in full conformity with international standards.”⁸ It was further recommended by Haiti, and supported by Egypt, that the government “[e]nsure that local and regional governments take the appropriate measures to protect Christians from extremists, in particular in rural areas.”⁹

¹ Derek Hopwood et al., *Egypt*, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Egypt> (last updated Jun. 1, 2024).

² Jannik Lindner, *Must-Know Egypt Religions Statistics [Latest Report]*, GITNEX, <https://gitnux.org/egypt-religions-statistics/#:~:text=Approximately%2090%25%20of%20the%20Egyptian,Christians%20outside%20the%20Orthodox%20denomination> (last updated May 28, 2024).

³ *World Watch List 2024*, OPEN DOORS, <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/> (last visited Mar. 25, 2024).

⁴ *Egypt*, OPEN DOORS UK, <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/egypt/> (last visited Apr. 11, 2024).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Universal Periodic Review – Egypt*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/eg-index> (last visited Mar. 25, 2024).

⁷ *Egypt Infographic*, OHCHR, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session34/EG/Egypt_Infographic.pdf (last visited Mar. 25, 2024).

⁸ *UPR of Egypt (3rd Cycle – 34th Session): Thematic List of Recommendations*, OHCHR, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session34/EG/UPR34_Egypt_Thematic_list_of_Recommendations.docx (last visited Mar. 25, 2024).

⁹ *Id.*

Legal Framework

4. The Constitution of Egypt “affirms that the principles of Islamic Sharia are the principle [sic] source of legislation.”¹⁰ Article 2 of the Constitution states that “Islam is the religion of the state and Arabic is its official language. The principles of Islamic Sharia are the principle [sic] source of legislation.”¹¹ Article 3 states that “[t]he principles of the laws of Egyptian Christians and Jews are the main source of laws regulating their personal status, religious affairs, and selection of spiritual leaders.”¹²

5. Article 64 enshrines protections for religious liberty: “Freedom of belief is absolute. The freedom of practicing religious rituals and establishing places of worship for the followers of revealed religions is a right organized by law.”¹³

6. Article 98 F of the Penal Code of Egypt has been used to arrest Christians for blasphemy. Under this article, individuals can be sentenced to prison from six months to five years for exploiting or using religion to advocate or propagate “extremist thoughts with the aim of instigating sedition and division or disdaining and contempting any of the heavenly religions or the sects belonging thereto, or prejudicing national unity or social peace.”¹⁴ Additionally, under the Church Construction Law, a church representative must obtain approval from a provincial governor to build or renovate a church.¹⁵

7. Egypt is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).¹⁶ Article 18 of the ICCPR enshrines protections for religious freedom:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.¹⁷

Article 27 of the ICCPR establishes protections for religious minorities: “In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities

¹⁰ CONSTITUTION OF THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT pmb., 18 Jan. 2014.

¹¹ *Id.* art. 2.

¹² *Id.* art. 3.

¹³ *Id.* art. 64.

¹⁴ Law No. 58 of 1937 (Promulgating the Penal Code), *al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣrīyah*, 31 Jul. 1937, art. 98 F (Egypt).

¹⁵ Law No. 80 of 2016 (Church Construction Law), *al-Jarīdah al-Rasmīyah*, 28 Sept. 2016, art. 3 (Egypt).

¹⁶ *Ratification Status for Egypt*, OHCHR,

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=54&Lang=EN (last visited Mar. 25, 2024).

¹⁷ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 18, *adopted* Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.”¹⁸

Religious Persecution

8. Christians in Egypt largely face persecution from the Muslim majority at the societal level.¹⁹ Christian women are harassed in public, Christian children are bullied at school, and Muslim mobs use violence and accusations of blasphemy to force Christians to move out of their communities.²⁰ Persecution is more extreme in rural communities, where the Muslim majority has significant influence over the local governments.²¹ In Egypt, law enforcement is often unwilling to protect Christians and the perpetrators of these attacks go unpunished.²²

9. Christians who have converted from Islam face unique hardships and persecution from the government.²³ For example, Muslims who have converted to Christianity are prohibited from having this change reflected on their identity cards.²⁴ This means that Christians are officially recognized as Muslims, even though they have converted.²⁵ This policy also affects their children.²⁶ In Egypt, the religious registration of the father is, by default, applied to his children.²⁷ Because a Christian convert is unable to change his religious identification, this means that his children will automatically be registered as Muslim.²⁸ Further, if a man marries a Muslim woman and he later converts to Christianity, the marriage becomes invalid under the law.²⁹

10. Christian converts also face persecution from their own family and friends.³⁰ One Christian convert shared that “[f]anatics, or even my own family, would kill me if they saw my picture online and read I rejected Islam.”³¹ In Egypt, converting from Islam is viewed as a shameful act that brings dishonor to the family.³² Because of this, many converts are pressured by their families to renounce their Christian faith.³³ Government authorities have also reportedly detained and questioned converts to intimidate them into keeping their faith a secret.³⁴

¹⁸ *Id.* art. 27.

¹⁹ EGYPT: FULL COUNTRY DOSSIER, OPEN DOORS (2024), https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Egypt-Full_Country_Dossier-ODI-2024.pdf.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Egypt, supra* note 4.

³¹ *Id.*

³² EGYPT: FULL COUNTRY DOSSIER, *supra* note 19.

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Egypt, supra* note 4.

11. Christians are also victims of blasphemy laws that are used by the Muslim majority to intimidate and silence Christians. One Egyptian civil rights lawyer estimates that 90% of the blasphemy charges that are filed are against Christians.³⁵ Simple rumors of blasphemy can spread in a community and lead to mob violence, particularly in rural areas.³⁶ Many times, judges feel pressured by the Muslim community and are worried that they may anger religious extremists if they release Christians who have been accused of blasphemy.³⁷

12. Christian women are especially targeted and harassed.³⁸ In rural regions of Egypt, Christian women have been kidnapped, held for ransom, forced to convert, and marry Muslim men.³⁹ While some women are abducted straight off of the street, the more common tactic involves grooming and deceit.⁴⁰ Muslim men approach Christian women and attempt to enter into a romantic relationship with them and convince them to elope.⁴¹ These men promise the women that they are converting to Christianity.⁴² However, these women are instead forced to convert to Islam.⁴³ In some cases, these women are filmed being sexually abused, which is used as blackmail to keep them from leaving.⁴⁴ In these cases, police are often dismissive of the women's stories because they claim they willingly eloped with the man.⁴⁵

13. Further, Egypt's law requiring approval for church construction has led to tension and violence between Christians and Muslims.⁴⁶ Since the law was enacted in 2016, more than 2,500 requests have been approved.⁴⁷ However, approximately 3,000 applications are still waiting to receive word from the government.⁴⁸ News about the approval for construction has led to mob violence from Muslims who oppose the construction of new churches or renovations to existing churches.⁴⁹ To quell the violence, local governments utilize "reconciliation sessions," which are heavily biased toward Muslims, and in many cases, Muslim attackers go unpunished.⁵⁰

14. There are many specific examples of the persecution described above. Following are just a few, but they will highlight the violations that are regularly occurring in Egypt.

³⁵ *Egypt's Blasphemy Law*, WORLD WATCH MONITOR, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/egypts-blasphemy-law/> (last visited Apr. 1, 2024).

³⁶ EGYPT: FULL COUNTRY DOSSIER, *supra* note 19.

³⁷ *Coptic Minor Released After Serving Blasphemy Sentence*, INT'L CHRISTIAN CONCERN (July 28, 2021), <https://www.persecution.org/2021/07/28/coptic-minor-released-blasphemy-sentence/>.

³⁸ EGYPT: FULL COUNTRY DOSSIER, *supra* note 19.

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *Id.*

15. On January 22, 2024, a twenty-one-year-old Christian woman was kidnapped in Asyut, Egypt.⁵¹ When the family reported it to the police, the police were initially dismissive of the accusation and told the family that she willingly ran off with a Muslim man.⁵² Authorities eventually arrested and charged a man potentially involved with her kidnapping, but the woman herself has not been returned.⁵³ As her family continued to search for her, it was discovered that her government ID was changed against her will to indicate that she was Muslim.⁵⁴ As of this writing, there have been no updates on her whereabouts.

16. On July 18, 2023, Zaki, a Christian graduate student, was sentenced to three years in prison for allegedly inciting violence.⁵⁵ Zaki was initially arrested on February 7, 2020, after he wrote an opinion piece describing what it is like to live as a persecuted Christian in Egypt.⁵⁶ Thankfully, soon after he was sentenced, he was pardoned by the President of Egypt.⁵⁷

17. On January 8, 2023, a Muslim mob attacked homes belonging to Coptic Christians, looted their shops, and threw rocks at a church.⁵⁸ The attack began after there was a car accident involving a Muslim and a Coptic Christian.⁵⁹

18. On Christmas Eve, 2022, a group of Muslims attacked a Christian church.⁶⁰ The attack happened after authorities approved the church's application to fix the roof.⁶¹ The mob threw rocks at the individuals working on the roof and even set fire to a Christian farmhouse located next to the church.⁶² In order to calm the mob, authorities halted construction on the roof indefinitely.⁶³

19. In February 2022, a twenty-two-year-old Christian was sentenced to two years in prison with hard labor after he had engaged in a debate with an individual over Islamic scripture.⁶⁴ When he was initially arrested, he was told to convert to Islam.⁶⁵ After he refused to renounce his faith, he was charged with having “contempt for the Islamic religion.”⁶⁶

⁵¹ *Officials in Egypt Abet Kidnappers of Christian Woman, Father Says*, MORNING STAR NEWS (Mar. 14, 2024), <https://morningstarnews.org/2024/03/officials-in-egypt-abet-kidnappers-of-christian-woman-father-says/>.

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ Abigail Hart, *Persecuted Christian in Egypt Facing Prison Pardoned by President*, GLO. CHRISTIAN RELIEF (July 20, 2023), <https://globalchristianrelief.org/christian-persecution/stories/persecuted-christian-in-egypt-facing-prison-pardoned-by-president/>.

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ Nader Shukry, *Police Restore Order in Ashrouba Following Attack Against Copts*, WATANINET (Jan. 9, 2023, 11:07 PM), <https://en.wataninet.com/coptic-affairs-coptic-affairs/coptic-affairs/police-restore-order-in-ashrouba-following-attack-against-copts/40725/>.

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ Raymond Ibrahim, *Christmas Eve Church Violence Erupts in Egypt*, COPTIC SOLIDARITY (Dec. 27, 2022), <https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2022/12/27/christmas-eve-church-violence-erupts-in-egypt/>.

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ Abigail Hart, *Persecuted Christian in Egypt Beaten Then Imprisoned*, GLOB. CHRISTIAN RELIEF (May 12, 2023), <https://globalchristianrelief.org/christian-persecution/stories/persecuted-christian-in-egypt-beaten-then-imprisoned/>.

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ *Id.*

20. On January 30, 2022, Egyptian security forces arrested nine Coptic Christians who were protesting the government's refusal to allow for the rebuilding of a church that had burned down.⁶⁷ They were released from prison in April 2022.⁶⁸

21. On November 1, 2021, Christian pastor Sameh was taken by Egyptian national security officers as he was heading home from work.⁶⁹ According to Sameh's family, after he was arrested, he was tortured with "beatings, electrocution, stripping and dragging."⁷⁰ Sameh led a church in Cairo and posted sermons and encouraging messages to his Facebook group called Converts Ministry Group.⁷¹

22. On July 15, 2020, a seventeen-year-old Coptic Christian was arrested for blasphemy over comments he made on Facebook.⁷² While in prison, he was subjected to unsanitary conditions and extreme temperatures.⁷³ He was released from prison one year later, but was told that he must leave his village, as it was no longer safe for him to live there.⁷⁴

23. In 2019, a Coptic church closed down after a mob of Muslims attacked the church and beat a priest and another individual in front of 200 children who were attending a Bible class.⁷⁵ The attack came just one day after the village mayor accused the Christians of treason and encouraged neighbors to attack the church.⁷⁶ The mayor also sent a notice to the city council protesting the church's renovation.⁷⁷ The council took immediate action and halted all construction and confiscated building materials.⁷⁸

Recommendations

24. Egypt must take immediate steps to protect the rights of Christians to practice and share their faith freely. Individuals must be able to freely choose their religion without being harassed and targeted by the government, society, or family members. We also ask that Egypt allow Christians to build and renovate churches and protect them from being attacked by Muslim

⁶⁷ *Egypt: Release Nine Coptic Christians Detained for Attempting to Rebuild Church*, AMNESTY INT'L (Mar. 30, 2022), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/03/egypt-release-nine-coptic-christians-detained-for-attempting-to-rebuild-church/>.

⁶⁸ *Egypt Frees Nine Coptic Christians Arrested After Protest*, BARRON'S (Apr. 24, 2022), <https://www.barrons.com/news/egypt-frees-nine-coptic-christians-arrested-after-protest-01650801308>.

⁶⁹ Abigail Hart, *Pastor Sameh, a Persecuted Christian in Egypt, Tortured*, GLOB. CHRISTIAN RELIEF (Jul. 14, 2023), <https://globalchristianrelief.org/christian-persecution/stories/pastor-sameh-a-persecuted-christian-in-egypt-tortured/>.

⁷⁰ *Id.*

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Coptic Minor*, *supra* note 39.

⁷³ *Id.*

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ *Church Closed in Egypt After Muslim Mob Frightens Children in Sunday School*, MORNING STAR NEWS (Apr. 23, 2019), <https://morningstarnews.org/2019/04/church-closed-in-egypt-after-muslim-mob-frightens-children-in-sunday-school/>.

⁷⁶ *Id.*

⁷⁷ *Id.*

⁷⁸ *Id.*

extremists. It is imperative that Egypt uphold its obligations under the ICCPR and ensure that Christians can freely practice the tenets of their faith.