



NGO: EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR LAW AND JUSTICE

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RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN EGYPT

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Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also has Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The purpose of this report is to raise concerns regarding human rights violations in the Arab Republic of Egypt [hereinafter Egypt] for the 2019 Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Background

2. Open Doors USA currently lists Egypt as the 16th worst country for Christians¹. Egypt's Coptic Christians, who make up the vast majority of the 9 million Christians in Egypt, have long faced persecution; far too often they are victims of atrocities committed by Islamic extremists².

3. Egypt's constitution establishes Islam as the official religion, and dictates that the principle source of legislation is Sharia³ law. Article 64 states: "The freedom of practicing religious rituals and establishing places of worship for the followers of revealed religion is a right organized by law"⁴.

4. Additionally, Egypt is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Article 18 of the ICCPR states:

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 teaching⁵.

5. It is critical that Egypt work to enforce the principles that it has established so that all its citizens are permitted to safely exercise their religion without fear of violence from the State or society.

Persecution from Islamic Extremists

6. Christians are routinely the target of Islamic extremists, and it is not uncommon for these attacks to take place at places of worship during major Christian religious holidays⁶, such as Christmas and Easter where Christians all around Egypt gather to worship.

¹ *World Watch List: Egypt*, OPEN DOORS, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/egypt/> (last visited 27 Mar. 2019).

² Matt Rehbein, *Who are Egypt's Coptic Christians?*, CNN (26 May 2017, 10:00 AM), <https://www.cnn.com/2017/04/09/middleeast/egypt-coptic-christians/index.html>.

³ EGYPT'S CONST. OF 2014, available at https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2014.pdf.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Dec. 16, 1966, S. Treaty Doc. No. 95-20, 6 I.L.M. 368 (1967), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, art. 18.

⁶ Ewelina U. Ochab, *Persecution of Christians in Egypt*, FORBES (10 Apr. 2017, 6:07 PM), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2017/04/10/persecution-of-christians-in-egypt/#6c1ff7cb15ea>.

7. In April of 2017, 50 Christians were killed as a result of a coordinated bombing at two churches on Palm Sunday by the Islamic State⁷. Marian Abdel Malak, a 26-year-old who lost three loved ones in the attack, issued a startling warning: “If things stay like this and we don’t get our rights we definitely have no future We would be better off dead because we don’t have any place anywhere in the country – in schools, or in government departments. We don’t have any value⁸”.

8. On 29 December 2017, nine Coptic Christians were killed as a result of two terror attacks carried out by jihadists. The first of these attacks was carried out by at least one Islamic State terrorist on a motorcycle who attempted to storm a Church in south Cairo before being killed by security forces. The terrorist was found wearing an explosive belt, that if detonated, would have resulted in numerous more casualties. However, this attack still resulted in the death of six civilians and one police officer⁹. The second attack was carried out against a Christian owned-shop resulting in two deaths¹⁰.

9. According to report by the BBC in 2017, “More than 100 Christians have been killed in Egypt during the past year, with most attacks claimed by the local branch of IS militants”¹¹. One commentator, describing the situation as “ongoing crisis,” had this to say about the continued assault on Christians in Egypt: “It’s more continuity than change, we still need more details to come up, but so far Egypt has witnessed over 2,000 attacks in the last three years”¹².

10. In November 2018, Islamic militants attacked three buses carrying Christians on a pilgrimage to a desert monastery south of Cairo. The attack resulted in the death of seven Christians, two of which were children, and injured 19¹³.

Conclusion

11. In January of 2019, the President of Egypt, Abdul Fattah al-Sisi inaugurated Egypt’s largest cathedral. At the inauguration, President Sisi stated that “We are one and will remain one”¹⁴. This was an important symbol of unity and the ECLJ encourages Egypt’s president to uphold this promise and ensure that Christians in Egypt are protected.

⁷ Orla Guerin, *Egyptian Christians Living in Fear for the Future*, BBC NEWS (27 Apr. 2017), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39694408>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Egypt Attack: Gunman Targets Coptic Christians in Church and Shop*, BBC NEWS (29 Dec. 2017), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42511813>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Stoyan Zaimov, *Gunmen Attack Coptic Christians in Cairo Church and Shop, Killing 9*, CHRISTIAN POST WORLD (29 Dec. 2017), <https://www.christianpost.com/news/at-least-12-slaughtered-terror-attack-coptic-christians-cairo-211872/>.

¹³ Associated Press, *Egypt Attack: Gunmen Kill Seven Coptic Christians in Bus Ambush*, The Guardian (2 Nov. 2018, 21:13 PM), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/03/egypt-attack-gunmen-kill-coptic-christians-bus-ambush>.

¹⁴ *Egypt Opens Middle East’s Biggest Cathedral Near Cairo*, BBC NEWS (7 Jan. 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-46775842>.

12. All citizens should be permitted to exercise their religion without the threat of being killed. Islamic extremists acting with impunity pose a grave threat to religious freedom. In order for Egypt wants to ensure that Christians have a place in the future of Egypt, it needs to work now to guarantee their protection. Egypt needs to be reminded of its legal obligations, both nationally and internationally, to protect the rights and lives of all its citizens.