



Blessed be Egypt my People



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Free Father Mattaas

Freedom House Sends High-Level Delegation to Egypt

Freedom House will send a high-level delegation to Cairo next week for talks on how to best support the Egyptian government and civil society in their efforts to strengthen human and civil rights.

Thomas A. Dine, vice chair of the Freedom House Board of Trustees, will lead the delegation which arrives on Monday. Other members include Dr. Daniel Calingaert, deputy director of programs, and Sameer Jarrah, director of Freedom House's New Generation project. The delegation plans to meet with officials from the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, the National Council for Human Rights and Egyptian human rights organizations.

The delegation's visit comes as government and civil society leaders examine which reforms the country should adopt prior to elections in 2010 and 2011. Freedom House has organized a series of dialogues this year on these issues, the most recent of which attracted more than 100 prominent Egyptians including members of the Shura Council, parliamentarians, academics, political activists and civil society leaders. This dialogue in June was co-sponsored by Freedom

House and the National Council for Human Rights, and a previous forum was held with the Democracy and Human Rights Studies Centre at Cairo University and the One World Foundation for Development and Civil Society Care.

Freedom House is also partnering with civil society organizations in Egypt to educate citizens about voter registration, conduct research on women's rights and develop a documentary on internet freedom. Freedom House, an independent nongovernmental organization that supports the expansion of freedom in the world, has been monitoring political rights and civil liberties in Egypt since 1972.



Egypt cleric "to ban full veils"



The niqab has become increasingly popular among Egypt's Muslim radicals

Egypt's highest Muslim authority has said he will issue a religious edict against the growing trend for full women's veils, known as the niqab.

Sheikh Mohamed Tantawi, dean of al-Azhar university, called full-face veiling a custom that has nothing to do with the Islamic faith. Although most Muslim women in Egypt wear the Islamic headscarf, increasing numbers are adopting the niqab as well.

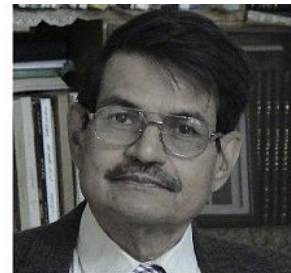
The practice is widely associated with more radical trends of Islam. The niqab question reportedly arose when Sheikh Tantawi was visiting a girls' school in Cairo at the weekend and asked one of the students to remove her niqab. The Egyptian newspaper al-Masri al-Yom quoted him expressing surprise at the girl's attire and telling her it was merely a tradition, with no connection to religion or the Koran.

Source BBC

جمال البنا: إرتداء النقاب ليس حرية شخصية

أقام 13 محامي اخواني قضية أمام محكمة القضاء الإداري ضد وزير التعليم العالي ورئيس جامعة القاهرة لإلغاء قرار منع دخول المنتقبات الجامعة وتمكينهم من الإقامة بالمدينة الجامعية. وصرح المفكر الإسلامي جمال البنا في حديث لـ "الأقباط متحدون" أن حرية المنتقبة في الشارع عندما تسير بالنقاب لكن دخولها الجامعة أو أماكن العمل فلا بد أن تعمل بقواعد المكان وتزجج النقاب عنها. وأضاف البنا أن هذه ليست حرية شخصية كما يستندون في دعواهم، فلو كان الأمر حرية شخصية فلماذا لا يتركوا من ترتدي الميني جيب؟ فهذا مثل ذلك إذا طبقنا مبدأ الحرية الشخصية، ويرى البنا أن مقيمي الدعوى من محامي الإخوان لن يحصلوا على حكم لصالحهم لأن النقاب لا بد أن يُلغى.

تنعي أقباط متحدون بريطانيا الكاتب والمفكر الصحفي واللغوي المصري البارز المخلص لمصرية الأستاذ بيومي قنديل (1942 - 2009)



الذي رحل عن عالمنا الجمعة 9 أكتوبر 2009 مع خالص مواساتنا لأسرته الكريمة داعين الله عز وجل أن يتغمده برحمته وينزله منازل الصديقين .

RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND RELATED FORMS OF INTOLERANCE: FOLLOW-UP TO AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DURBAN DECLARATION AND PROGRAMME OF ACTION

Written statement* submitted by the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

**تقرير أمام مجلس حقوق الإنسان في الأمم المتحدة عن
منع المحاكم في مصر للمتصرين من إثبات ديانتهم الجديدة
في المستندات الرسمية**



**Reported by: The International Humanist and Ethical Union
in co-ordination with The United Copts GB.**

Religious freedom and the ICCPR

1. The importance of religious freedom cannot be overstated. Freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in Article 18 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), in which paragraph 18.2 states that: "No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice."
2. It is notable however that certain states, and in particular member states of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), have consistently failed to honour their obligations to uphold this right, subjecting citizens who wish to change their religion to coercion.

The requirement to officially register one's religion

3. We review here the requirement in many of these states to officially specify one's religion in breach of the right to freedom of religion or belief enshrined in the ICCPR. We note with concern cases in which States limit the freedom of an individual to represent his or her actual religion on official documents, and challenge the legitimacy of States requiring their citizens to report their religious beliefs.
4. Mr Mohammed Higazi is an Egyptian who wishes his official documentation to register the fact that he has converted from Islam to Christianity. At the age of 16 all Egyptians are required to obtain an ID that states their religion as Muslim, Christian or Jewish. These cards are necessary for virtually every aspect of life, from banking, to education and medical treatment. Although born a Muslim, Higazi has been a practising Christian since he was a teenager. Now married, he wishes his child to be registered as Christian – only possible if he can change the religion on his own identity

- card to Christian. Higazi was the first individual born a Muslim to appeal for official state recognition of his conversion, thus the official recognition of such a conversion was unprecedented. Higazi filed his case on 2 August 2007, and was denied the right to officially convert on 29 January 2008. By way of justification, the judge appealed to Sharia Law in order to substantiate the claim that one cannot convert to an 'older religion', stating that: "monotheistic religions were sent by God in chronological order... as a result, it is unusual to go from the latest religion to the one that preceded it."
5. Mr Maher El-Gohary was the second individual to lodge such an appeal. He converted to Christianity thirty years ago he now needs his religion to be recognised by the state for his daughter to receive a Christian education. On 16 June 2009, a Cairo judge ruled against his request, despite El-Gohary's production of official baptism papers. The judge had received a report from the State Council, a consultative body of Egypt's Administrative Court, expressing outrage at El-Gohary's "audacity" to request a change in the religious designation on his ID. The report claimed that his case was a threat to social order and violated Sharia law.
 6. Both El-Gohary and his daughter have been violently threatened during their 10-month campaign, and have been driven into hiding.
 - 7 Particularly worrying was the call by Sheikh Yossef El-Badri, a leading Islamic scholar, for Muslims to kill Maher El-Gowhari for apostasy.
 7. We have received a copy of a fatwa stamped by Al-Azhar mosque which states that apostates are to be asked to repent and return to Islam, otherwise jurisprudence requires that they be killed.
 8. Egypt signed the ICCPR on the 4th August 1967, and

ratified it on the 14th January 1982. Egypt is thus committed to Article 18, which states that:

“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.”

This is reinforced by the Human Rights Committee General Comment 22, of 30 July 1993, that “the freedom to “have or to adopt” a religion or belief **necessarily entails the freedom to choose a religion or belief, including the right to replace one’s current religion or belief with another or to adopt atheistic views**, as well as the right to retain one’s religion or belief.”(Bold formatting added)

9. The Egyptian constitution enshrines this commitment. Article 46 states that ‘The State shall guarantee the freedom of belief and the freedom of practice of religious rites’.

Yet the cases of Mohammed Higazi and Maher El-Gohary clearly demonstrate that Egypt is failing to protect its citizens’ fundamental freedom to change their religious belief.

10. In Egypt, Sharia courts exist for the resolution of issues regarding the personal status of Muslims, such as marriage and inheritance. However, a non-religious Supreme Court operates above both the Sharia personal status courts and the secular criminal courts. In rejecting the requests of Higazi and El-Gohary, both judges appealed to Sharia law, a controversial step since neither individual considers himself to be Muslim and therefore not subject to Sharia law. By imposing Sharia law in such cases, the judges interpret the Constitution’s provision of religious freedom as inapplicable to Muslim citizens who wish to convert to another religion.

11. These two rulings, insofar as they set a precedent for future rulings, constitute a crushing blow to Egypt’s commitment to the freedom of religion of its citizens.

12. In conclusion, the International Humanist and Ethical Union respectfully requests the government of Egypt to uphold its commitment to Article 18 of the ICCPR and Article 46 of its own constitution, by ensuring that those who wish to convert from any faith to another, or to none, are readily able to do so. We urge the Egyptian courts to rule according to the Egyptian constitution.

A case from Malaysia

13. Every Malaysian citizen over the age of 12 must carry an identification card, a ‘MyKad’, which states the bearer’s religion. This requirement is in clear breach of the ICCPR under which States have no right to demand to know the religion of any of their citizens. This point is reinforced by Section 3 of General Comment 22 of the Human Rights Committee: ‘In accordance with arti-

cles 18.2 and 17, no one can be compelled to reveal his thoughts or adherence to a religion or belief.’

14. Lina Joy, a Malaysian who converted to Christianity 10 years ago, recently applied to have the religious status ‘Islam’ removed from her identification card. On application to the Sharia courts, **the judge ruled against her with the racist claim that ‘as the plaintiff is a Malay, she is subjected to the laws of Islam until she dies’**¹⁸. After further appeals and rejections, Joy’s lawyer appealed to Malaysia’s highest court, the Court of Appeals, arguing that her conversion be considered a right protected under the Constitution, not a religious matter for the Sharia courts. Her appeal was rejected. According to the Court’s judgement, the law does not officially recognise Lina Joy’s conversion from Islam to Christianity. According to Sharia law within most Malaysian states, apostasy or conversion is a punishable offence; either with a fine, a jail sentence or both. However, those who renounce their Muslim faith argue that Sharia courts do not have jurisdiction over them.

15. We call upon the government of Malaysia to honour its commitment to freedom of religion by enabling those who wish to convert from Islam to do so. The freedom protected by Article 11, Section 1 of the Malaysian Constitution should not be interpreted as falling under the jurisdiction of Sharia Law; it is a fundamental human right and cannot be subject to religious interpretation. We welcome reports from the Attorney General’s chambers that it was considering establishing a commission to study sensitive cases like Joy’s, and hope for a public clarification of the proper jurisdiction of Sharia law.

16. Many states, however, notably member states of the OIC, require citizens to state their religion on official documentation. Of particular concern are the states of Indonesia, Pakistan, and Egypt; who, despite either signing or ratifying the ICCPR, still demand registration with a particular religion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

17. The requirement by States that citizens specify their religion on official documents, that only certain religions are officially recognised, and the denial of the right to change one’s religion, are all examples of failure of States to honour their commitments to the ICCPR.

18. We respectfully request all States to eliminate laws which require citizens to specify their religion on official documents or, if that requirement cannot immediately be changed, to remove all barriers to the registration of any religion or belief, including “none”, and to permit all citizens to freely change their religion or belief without discrimination.

19. Finally, we urge all OIC member States to take immediate steps to end all discrimination against non-Muslims, including Christians, Jews, Hindus, Bahais and non-believers.

United Nations Human Rights Council

Universal Periodic Review, 7th Session

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – Stakeholder Submission

EGYPT

1. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is a human rights organisation specialising in freedom of religion and belief. CSW has conducted monitoring and advocacy with regards to the human rights situation in Egypt for more than ten years, with regular fact-finding visits to the country. This submission highlights key human rights concerns in relation to freedom of religion and belief, and discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation.

STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS

2. Egypt is party to a number of international human rights covenants and treaties¹ and its constitution provides for equality and freedom of religion and belief and opinion.

However two important barriers structurally hinder Egyptian citizens from full enjoyment of their rights.

3. Following the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981, Egypt declared a state of emergency and implemented numerous Emergency Laws, giving the security forces the right to detain any suspect indefinitely without legal representation or official charge. During their detention, individuals can be subjected to a wide range of human rights abuses, including torture, solitary confinement, sexual and psychological abuse, and threats of harm to the detainee's family. In July 2006, new legislation limited the period of detention to six months, at the end of which charges must either be presented in court or the accused must be released. However, security forces continue to arbitrarily hold suspects without taking them to court and are also known to disobey a court's order of release. The vast majority of human rights abuses in the country are committed by the State Security Intelligence Services (SSIS) which, along with the regular police force,



comprises the domestic security apparatus. Plans to replace the Emergency Laws with a terrorism act remain pending, leading to fears that this will essentially institutionalise the current state of emergency. Such moves will lead to a further deterioration in human rights throughout the country, potentially allowing for further human rights violations by the security forces.

4. Recommendation: The Egyptian Government must repeal Emergency Laws immediately, control and limit arbitrary rights granted to the security forces, and uphold the rule of law.

5. Article 2 of the Egyptian constitution states that "Islam is the religion of the state and Islamic jurisprudence is the principle source of legislation." Article 2 was amended in 1980 from the original, which stated that Islam is "a" principle source of legislation, thereby turning Shari'a Law into "the" primary source of law. However Egyptian law uses only a limited amount of traditional Islamic jurisprudence, mostly in personal status matters. This automatically creates serious problems in the implementation of freedom of religion and belief.

6. For example, on 2 August 2007, after several failed attempts to change his religious affiliation on his ID card, Mohammed Ahmed Hegazy, a 25-year-old Muslim Background Christian (MBC), took

the unprecedented step of filing suit against the Minister of Interior, Habib al-Adly. Prior to this, Mr Hegazy had been tortured in detention in 2002 following his conversion. His original lawyer was forced to withdraw from the case after receiving death threats and having three separate cases filed against him on charges of disrupting national unity. Mr Hegazy's case was widely covered in the Egyptian and wider Middle Eastern media, forcing him to go into hiding to protect his pregnant wife. On 29 January 2007, Judge Muhammad Hussein ruled against Hegazy's challenge. The ruling was based on Article 2 of the Egyptian constitution, and argued that since Islam was the last of the three "heavenly religions", to be a Muslim was to "practice freedom of religion", thus leaving Islam was not possible².

7. Such a ruling is not compatible with Article 18 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), or with Article 40 of the Egyptian Constitution which states: "all citizens are equal before the law. They have equal public rights and duties without discrimination between them due to race, ethnic origin, language, religion or creed". The ruling also contradicts articles 46 and 47 of the Constitution, which guarantee freedom of belief, practice of religious rites, and freedom of opinion respectively.

8. Recommendation: The Egyptian Government must address the ambiguous nature of Article 2 of the Egyptian Constitution, examine how it relates to other provisions in Egyptian law as well as to Egypt's responsibilities under international law, and ensure that the judicial system produces judgments in accordance with such provisions.

TREATMENT OF NON-MUSLIM MINORITIES

Coptic Christians

9. Although Coptic Christians make up around 10 percent of the Egyptian population, they are considerably under-represented within the public sector. It is very difficult for “Copts” to access and participate in local and national politics. There are no high-ranking Copts in the armed and security forces, or in key public and private sector businesses such as banks, although a small number of Copts hold minor offices. There are relatively more Copts in the judicial and diplomatic services with disproportionately fewer in senior roles. There are no Christian heads of universities or deans of faculties. Egyptian universities lack courses related to Coptic history and presence in Egypt, and they do not hold courses on Coptic language, literature, archaeology and art. Coptic educational institutes receive no public funding.

10. Until 2005, the Coptic Church needed presidential permission to build new churches as well as for the most minor maintenance on their places of worship. A Presidential decree has since sought to localise construction and extension permissions. It has allowed renovations and repairs to be conducted upon written notification being submitted to the relevant local authorities, with the authority to allow reconstruction on the same site being delegated to provincial governors.

11. However, government permission is still required for new church buildings. In practice it remains almost impossible to open a new church building, and delays in dealing with applications mean that a church must wait indefinitely before the paperwork ever reaches the President. Similarly, the vague requirements of ‘supporting documents’ which need to be submitted to the local authorities enable local officials and security forces to further hinder major repairs and reconstructions. Performing repairs to church property is still largely obstructed either by local government officials, who delay authorisation by bureaucratic means, or

by the state security police, who often stop construction even when official permission has been granted.

12. Recommendation: The Egyptian Government must address the glass-ceiling that prevents full Coptic involvement in Egyptian society. It should also end all restrictions and practices that hinder the building and maintenance of Coptic places of worship, and actively promote the inclusion of Coptic culture into mainstream Egyptian culture.

Muslim Background Christians

13. Of all the religious minorities in the country, Muslims who decide to change their religion, particularly to the Christian faith, are the most vulnerable to both state-sponsored persecution and to discrimination originating from their own communities. Although conversion from Christianity to Islam is often encouraged and easily done, life-long problems await apostates from Islam.

14. MBC’s are often detained for extended periods of time by the SSIS and subjected to incommunicado imprisonment, torture and sexual harassment. They are tried at the State Security Court, as if they pose a national security threat. Often SSIS officers inform the neighbours and employers of apostates of their conversion, thus precipitating loss of employment, housing and relationships. They are often blocked from attending churches, Christian schools and ministries. Married converts face the risk of annulment of marriages, and the complete loss of custody and inheritance rights. They are also vulnerable to strong reactions from their families and local communities, particularly in rural areas. Over the years, there have been suspected cases of honour killings, disappearances, forced marriages to Muslims, severe beatings, forced movement to other towns or cities, or going into hiding. Egyptian press and religious outlets often call for harsh reactions towards apostates. The seeming direct or indirect support of their persecution through negligence by the security forces has resulted in a culture of impunity, whereby attacking

or harming an apostate is not considered a crime to be hidden or shunned.

15. Recommendation: The Egyptian Government should address serious human rights violations faced by Muslim-background Christians, halt their arbitrary arrests and mistreatment by the police and enable converts to live their lives without fear of life-threatening discrimination.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION AND ID CARDS

16. Religious affiliation registration, which includes a religion section on national ID cards, affects MBC’s and Bahá’is significantly. Whilst converts to Islam from another religion can change their official records and IDs within 24 hours with a supporting statement from Al-Azhar, the reverse is almost impossible. Since they are still registered as Muslims, this automatically limits the expression of their new faith and participation within the Christian community, and creates serious problems, including not being allowed to marry and an inability to withdraw their children from compulsory Islamic religious education at school.

17. Until March 2009, Bahá’is were forced to register under one of the three recognised religious categories (Christian, Muslim and Jew) or face the dreadful outcome of not having an ID, including imprisonment or not being able to do the most basic official transactions, such as opening bank accounts. Although, they can now legally fill in their religious records with a simple dash, in practice Bahá’is still experience the most severe difficulties in recording their religious affiliation.

18. Recommendation: The Egyptian Government should remove the religious affiliation records, or alternatively, ensure a simple and unified mechanism for all citizens to record or change their religions.

ETHNIC VIOLENCE

19. Throughout 2006 to 2009, there has been a significant rise in the number of reported attacks on the properties, businesses and religious centres of Coptic Orthodox Christians. These attacks, which often start following a minor personal dispute, a

sermon preached at a mosque or incitement within the media, result in serious material and physical damage. Egyptian government and security forces have often fuelled such attacks through inability, negligence and, on occasion, the forceful cover up of events. Perpetrators are rarely brought to justice and victims are obliged to give up their access to justice through forced testimonies or mock reconciliation meetings.

20. Recommendation: The Egyptian Government must ensure that ethnic violence and sectarian clashes are treated as criminal offences, and should halt the victimisation of victims through forced reconciliation meetings that culminate in unjust resolutions.

TREATMENT OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

21. Egypt regularly and forcefully deports asylum seekers and those with confirmed refugee status back to their country of origin, even though this might result in a life threatening situation.

22. In June 2008, the Egyptian Government deported almost 1000 of the 1600 Eritrean refugees held in Egyptian prisons. Whilst being detained for several months, the prisoners were kept in inhumane conditions, subjected to beatings and sexual harassment, and denied access to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Despite a 15 June announcement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs pledging access to the UNHCR, deportations to Eritrea continued in direct contravention of the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the United Nations Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.

23. Around 800 of the returned refugees remain in detention in Eritrea. According to reports, a number of the returned refugees were shot dead in front of others as an example. In December 2008 approximately 100 further Eritreans were detained in Sinai by Egyptian authorities after being returned by the Israeli Army after illegally crossing the border. The group was also denied access to the

UNHCR, and at least 80 have been deported, some of whom were assaulted whilst in the custody of the Egyptian prison guards. Egyptian security forces have also been fatally shooting African migrants attempting to cross the border with Israel; to date at least 34 have been shot dead.

24. Recommendation: The Egyptian Government should halt illegal deportations immediately, launch an official enquiry into the treatment of asylum seekers and the inhumane outcomes of their deportations, end the shooting of refugees by border police, and abide by its obligations under the international refugee conventions.

LACK OF DOMESTIC MECHANISMS TO ADDRESS VIOLATIONS

25. There are no effective mechanisms to address human rights violations and ensure that the security forces comply with domestic and international law. CSW has welcomed the creation of the National Council for Human Rights (NCHR), a national human rights institution

established in June 2003 with a limited mandate to receive complaints of human rights infringements, investigate their validity, and advise the government of ways to improve human rights. However, not only are religious freedom abuses not addressed by the NCHR, but the Council also has no real legal or administrative power to ensure their recommendations are implemented. As is evident from its recent support for legitimising the state of emergency, careful wording of 'alleged' cases of torture, and the omission of serious human rights concerns, it appears that the Council serves more as a political tool to legitimise government activity.

26. Recommendation: The Egyptian Government should develop legally binding and judicially enforceable mechanisms to address serious human rights violations committed by security forces and ensure that Egyptian citizens can raise their concerns without fear of repercussion and in the belief that their grievances will be heard.

اتحاد الهيئات القبطية الاوروبية لحقوق الانسان (مكتب تقديم المساعدات القانونية)

المكتب القانوني لتقديم المساعدات القانونية:

يعمل اتحاد الهيئات القبطية الأوروبية "الاتحاد" في اتجاهين:

الاتجاه الأول هو التعريف بماهية حقوق الإنسان من خلال نشرها بالموقع أو تقديم دراسات في مجال حقوق الإنسان

والاتجاه الثاني هو في كيفية المطالبة بهذه الحقوق والوصول إلى العدالة إما على المستوى المحلي للبلد الواقع فيها الانتهاك وإما على المستوى الدولي في اتخاذ الإجراءات القانونية الدولية أمام الهيئات الدولية المعنية لحقوق الإنسان بالأمم المتحدة.

ولأجل هذا الغرض أنشأ "الاتحاد" المكتب القانوني لتقديم المساعدات القانونية، "المكتب القانوني" وذلك بالتعاون مع منظمة أمريكا للمساعدة القانونية ومقرها نيويورك.

ويعمل "المكتب القانوني" بالتعاون مع مكاتب قانونية محلية في البلد الواقع فيها الانتهاك **شروط تقديم المساعدة القانونية :**

1- تفويض صادر من الفرد، أو المنظمة العضو في "الاتحاد" أو منظمة أخرى مهتمة وتعمل في مجال حقوق الإنسان إلى المكتب القانوني.

2- تقديم كل المستندات والأحكام الدالة على أن هناك انتهاك لحقوق الإنسان للمكتب.

3- تقديم الدعم المادي لمباشرة الإجراءات القانونية.

4- يحتفظ المكتب في حقه لقبول التفويض أو عدمه بعد دراسة الشكوى فيما إذا كانت تتوافر فيها خصائص وأدلة دامغة لانتهاكات حقوق الإنسان وليست مخالفة عادية تخضع للقانون الوطني (المحلي).

5- ملاً الاستمارة الموجودة على الموقع والبيانات الخاصة بالشخص طالب المساعدة القانونية سواء منظمة أو فرد.

للاتصال : د. عوض شفيق المحامى ch.awad@gmail.com

الأستاذ حنا زكي المحامى hannalaw10@gmail.com



STOP PERSECUTING THE COPTS

European Union of Coptic Organisation for Human Rights submit a complain

To the International Organizations for Human Rights:

We respectfully submit this complaint:

The governors of the following Egyptian Governorates are constantly persecuting the Copts within their jurisdictions: Beni Sweif Dr. Ezzat Abdalla Ahmed - El Minia..... Dr. Ahmed Diaa El Din
Alexandria General Adel Labib

BENI SWEIF:

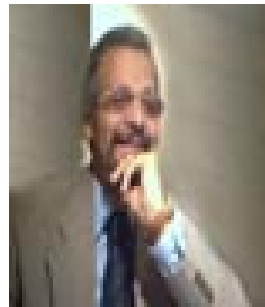
This is the latest event against the Copts of a village called "Eastern Boshra village", County of El Fashan, Beni Sweif Governorate.

As briefly as possible, the security men, who are assigned to secure the security of the people, have committed inhuman assault against the Christians of that village. The reason was that the Christians were praying in a house since there is no church in that village.

Before explaining the inhuman assault in details, we would like to point out that according to the decree of 1858 which is still valid, no churches could be established without the governor's release of a decree. That restriction is not, in any way, extended to the prayers. No decree, presidential or gubernatorial, is required for prayer.

Nonetheless, the security men who are working for the Ministry of Interior, and Beni Sweif Governorate, have inhumanly attacked the peaceable Christian inhabitants of the village. The attack has occurred on 150 Christian families to intimidate them. In so doing, they have assaulted the women in a very obscene manner. Since there was no legitimate reason for such assault, the authorities have justified that assault as for security measures.

The jungle rules have been applied. No body was permitted to visit the priest in his house, only one person at a time. If another person wanted to visit the priest,



Submitted By

Dr. Chafik Awad & Hanna Z. Hanna
Human Rights Advocates.

that person had to wait until the other visitor goes out. That action which is flagrantly against all human rights rules was also justified as for security measures.

Although the governor's prime duty is to secure the safety of all inhabitants, he kept silent before all those inhuman and illegal attacks. He rather has blessed the criminal assault.

In the course of their assault, the security men, whose duty is to protect the citizens, have assaulted a lonely girl in her own house. Her brother who takes care of her was at work. They have severely beaten her up in sensitive organs of her body, and then they dragged her to the street. Each time that poor girl relates the inhuman incident, she cries heart out and gets fainted.

Also, the security men have broken into an apartment of a girl who was engaged and she has prepared some stuff for the marriage. The assailants have destroyed all of her possessions.

The security men have attacked the cultivated lands and burnt more than three acres that belong to the Christians.

All of those attacks have occurred within the knowledge of the Governor, or at his blessings, despite the fact that he is responsible for the security of the inhabitants in his governorate.

Before those crimes, the Bishop of the area, Bishop

Astaphanos, together with tens of priests, have made a strike as a protest to all that happens against the Christians in the area.

Before all those attacks, assaults and inhuman aggressions, the governor was silent or rather pleased with that has happened.

Mr. Governor: If, at your era, the security men are the source of aggression, to whom may we have recourse to protect the inhabitants from such aggression?

EL MENIA

That painful event extends for more than one year. Abou Fana Monastery. That Monastery owned 252 agrarian acres, all of which were reclaimed by the monks of that monastery. The authorities have dispossessed 50 acres under the guise of archeological reasons. The monks continued to cultivate the land and spread the green on the swampland. But the pagan monks should not enjoy the fruits of their efforts.

The mobs of the neighboring Arabs have attacked the monks in their monastery in order to dispossess the monastery of a good portion of the land. They have severely beaten up the monks, tied them up, buried half of their bodies in the sand, and attempted to force them to spit on the cross or to say the two testimonies in order to have them convert to Islam. They harshly pushed the faces of the monks into the sand to swallow some of them. The poor monks were tortured to the extent that they were taken to the hospital in a critical condition.

In order to intimidate the monks, the Arab mobs have pulled out fire against them. The result was that one of the Arabs was shot dead.

In this poisonous atmosphere which was blessed by the authorities, it was found a good opportunity to falsely accuse somebody of that unintentional assassination. Since it made no sense to accuse one of the monks, they could find another prey. The prey was a contractor who was hired by the monastery to build the fence around the monastery. His name was Refaat. By the mean fabrication of the security, they have prepared some false witnesses to testify that they have seen Refaat pulling the fire against the victim. Since the fabrication could not be perfect, the false witnesses contradicted each other. Accordingly, Refaat and his brother were acquitted from the court.

The acquittal did not appeal to the security men. Hence, the security had recourse to an emergency decree, and in a flagrant abuse of their power, the security has incarcerated Refaat and his brother. The justification was "for security reasons" although they were fully aware of the fact that the detainees were innocent.

The purpose of the continuing detention of Refaat and his brother is to force the monastery to pay generous ransom to the family of the dead, and the monastery wouldn't do that.

The law is disabled. The Arabs are still in possession of the fire arms

The continuing aggression against the monastery mandated to erect a fence around the monastery. However, the governor has issued an order or a decree that the fence should not exceed one and a half meters in height. Does such fence secure the safety of the monastery? The security of all the inhabitants of the monastery is supposed to be the governor's prime responsibility, no matter what their religion is.

The most deplorable fact was that due the continuing pressure and the inhuman incarceration of the two Coptic innocents, the church found that there was no alternative but to yield to the unfair reconciliation. Accordingly, the monastery had to pay L.E. 600,000.00 (six hundred thousand) Egyptian dollars for the person who was dead by the mobs. At the same time, all the damages of the tortured monks were denied and lost.

Although we do not know how the jurisdiction of the Minister of Justice could implement the decision to change a village called "village of Bishop Yehnes" to "The valley of mint". All the inhabitants of that village are Copts. The original name of the village pertains to a Christian Saint a few centuries ago. The Coptic name did not appeal to the authorities. As soon as the name of the village has changed, all the inhabitants have launched a demonstration for weeks. In the end, the governor of Elminia has agreed to keep the Christian name of the village unchanged.

Also, in a city called "Mallawi", the El Minia governor has issued an order to eradicate 29 houses that belong to the Christians on which they are settled since 1964. The pretext was that Azhar Institute should be erected on their place. The Christian inhabitants have launched an endless demonstration which was about to convert to sectarian sedition all over the country. Only at this point, the governor has abstained from continuing to implement his plan, and withdrew the demolishing equipment.

Mr. Governor is ultimately requested to adjudge his conscience.

ALEXANDRIA

Prior to the current governor, the prior governor was very fair with all inhabitants without discrimination. Unfortunately, things have changed by the tenure of the present governor.

The present governor has eradicated the two build-

ings of the social service which were assigned to serve the needy. One was at the northern coast and the others was abetting the Mariout lake. Both of them belong to the Coptic Church. The governor's pretext was that they were built in violation of the environmental rules and without permission.

When the governor has realized that the two buildings were built in full compliance with the rules, he promised to damage the two buildings. So far he didn't fulfill his promise, and apparently, he wouldn't.

Thus, it is clear that the main purpose was to deter any activity to the Christians.

Also, he attempted, or rather started to demolish a hospital that belongs to a church in the city, but the church could timely prove that the hospital was built in full compliance to the rules.

The common sense requires that a check for the legitimate erection of the building comes first and if not, any action could be taken. But the governor of Alexandria adversely applies his own rules that reveal the discrimination against the Christianity.

MR. PRESIDENT

It is well known that the governors invoke your orders or permission before taking any discriminatory action. In response, we have to put the question: What wrong did the Christians do to you or to the country in order to tolerate the discrimination against them in such outrageous manner?

Further, the Fatwa Department which is an official governmental entity has issued a Fatwa (Islamic Opinion) that "permitting the construction of a church by a Muslim is tantamount to permitting the establishment of a gambling bar, or permitting the construction of a house to the pigs, dogs and cats." The Fatwa bears No. 1809 for 2008.

It is noteworthy that the department that issued that Fatwa is funded by the Christian taxpayers.

Hence, The E.U.C.O.H.R calls upon all peace lovers all over the world, and in particular, the International Human Rights Organizations to promptly interfere in that outrageous aspect before it is too late.

Muslim Representatives Are Subverting the International Human Rights System from Within

In a May 2, 2009 article posted on the liberal website www.elaph.org, the director of the Middle East Freedom Forum, Coptic Egyptian-American journalist Magdi Khalil,(1) wrote about the activity of Muslim representatives in international human rights organizations. He argued that these representatives were trying to subvert the human rights system from within by using it to stifle criticism of Muslim countries and of Islam while promoting hostility towards Israel. Following are excerpts from the article: (2) - **By Memri**

"The Arab and Islamic States Exercise Their Influence within the U.N. Human Rights Council to Affect Legislation... and Set Lower Standards for Human Rights, or Deny Those Rights"

"The current situation of the international system is unstable, which is possibly a sign of changes to come. The world order may shift away from unipolar American leadership towards multi-polarity, and the order established after World War II may cede its place to a new one that is in step with the post-globalization era. The uncertainty may also herald a global war giving rise to a new world order. Alternatively, it may herald a state of global chaos and the subsequent downfall of full state sovereignty, or a change in

standards that will allow for entities other than national states to join in, such as mega companies, regional institutions, prominent civil society organizations and powerful factions like Hizbullah and Hamas that are effectively controlling states.

"In any case, the international system is going through a confusing transition – which may last several years or even decades – and throughout this period, the world's nations will continue to vary in their perceptions and their actions while playing their [various] roles in developing and shaping the new order.

"The actions of most Islamic states within various international organizations and conferences strongly suggest that they are attempting to take advan-

tage of this international turmoil to subvert the human rights system. The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies noted

in its 2008 report about human rights conditions in the Arab states: 'The Arab and Islamic states are exercising their influence within the U.N. Human Rights Council to affect legislation and formulate new international criteria that set lower standards for human rights, or deny those rights.'

"The actions of Arab and Islamic representatives in international forums are designed to prohibit criticism against Islam and defend its reputation, to support the Palestinian cause and promote hostility towards Israel, and also to block any attempt to condemn the Arab and Muslim states, even when they are responsible for large massacres such as the genocide in Darfur."

"The Arab and Islamic States That Pushed for the Resolution [Against Defaming Religion] Are Mostly In-



Magdy Khalil

terested in Intimidating and Blackmailing the West – While They Themselves Continue to Show No Respect for Religious Diversity"

"On March 27, 2009, after two years of hard campaigning, the Arab and Islamic states managed to pass a resolution against 'defamation of religion' in the U.N. Human Rights Council (HRC). Twenty-three of the HRC member-states voted in favor of the resolution. It was championed by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Palestine, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan, and supported by Russia, China, and a number of African states, while 11 members, mostly from the West, opposed the resolution, and 13 abstained.

"The resolution stipulates that respect for all religions and protection against defamation are fundamental to the freedom of speech, expression, thought, belief and religion. It also states that the HRC 'notes with deep concern the intensification of the overall campaign of defamation of religions, and incitement to religious hatred in general, including the ethnic and religious profiling of Muslim minorities in the aftermath of the tragic events of 11 September 2001.' It emphasized that 'everyone has the right to hold opinions, without interference, and has the right to freedom of expression, the exercise of which carries with it special duties and responsibilities and may therefore be subject to limitations as are provided for by law and are necessary for respect of the rights or reputations of others, protection of national security or of public order, public health or morals, and general welfare.'

"Glancing at these statements, it is possible to think that they originated with the Egyptian Ministry of Information or the Pakistani parliament, rather than with a council whose basic mission is to safeguard rights and freedoms – primarily the freedoms of thought and expression. Geneva-based human rights activist Professor Elham Manea appropriately described the resolution as scandalous, asking sarcastically whether the council had left any work for the Saudi Authority for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. "The Western nations are privileged to have constitutions that are in harmony with the international charters of human rights, including the Universal

Declaration, which hold the utmost respect for the freedom of expression. Hence they will not heed a resolution that negates the basic right of thought, expression and the freedom of conscience. As for the Arab and Islamic states that pushed for the resolution, they are mostly interested in intimidating and blackmailing the Western world, while they themselves continue to show no respect for religious diversity in their own states, as proved by the daily slurs against all religions – except Islam – in those states.

"Islamic and Arab nations are adept at using intimidation tactics to influence proceedings and manipulate decisions in the civilized world. One such incidence took place in an HRC session in June 2008. The council was discussing human rights reports dealing with such issues as the status of women in Muslim states, the provisions of the Islamic *shari'a* regarding women, the stoning of adulterers, and child marriages. During the discussion, the Egyptian delegate interrupted, saying: '*Shari'a* law will not be subject of discussion, and Islam will not be crucified in this council.' His words had the desired effect, since the council president gave in and adjourned the meeting. Former U.N. Human Rights High Commissioner Louise Arbour commented on the incident by saying, 'It is very concerning that a council which should be the guardian of freedom of expression [observes] constraints or taboos, or subjects that have become taboo for discussion.'

"The Arab and Islamic [HRC Member-] States Strove to Protect the Sudanese Regime by Offering Lame and Misleading Explanations for the Situation in Darfur"

"Below are some further incidents, noted by the Cairo Institute, of subversive behaviour by delegates of Arab and Muslim [HRC member-] states in the Human Rights Council in 2008. In most of the cases, these states purported to defend Islam or protect Palestinian rights, but the facts indicate that their real goal was to undermine the international human rights legacy that the council aims to uphold.

"- Egypt, backed by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), strongly opposed sending a team of experts to further investigate the Darfur situation.

"- The Arab and Islamic states strove to protect the Sudanese regime by offering lame and misleading explanations for the situation in Darfur.

"- They made similar efforts to protect the coup regime in Mauritania.

"- The majority of the Arab states voted against the creation of a mechanism for comprehensive and periodic reviews, which would allow non-governmental organizations and independent experts to comment on the human rights practices in the country under review.

"- The Arab and Islamic states used the Palestinian issue to distract the council from the deteriorated human rights situation in their own states. In 2008, three of the five special sessions to discuss critical issues were devoted to Palestine; furthermore, the Arab and Islamic states managed to dedicate a hearing session on the Palestinian cause at every council meeting.

"- The Arab and Islamic states were hostile to NGOs and did their best to marginalize their role inside and outside the council.

"In sum, the Arab and Islamic states pursued a negative agenda with regards to human rights, whether within the council or at various international forums. They hindered rather than helped, justified the violations instead of expressing regret, and attempted to export their regressive values instead of interacting positively with the values of the rest of the world.

"Unfortunately, the Islamic states rely on a 'bloc voting' system, which bears more resemblance to the modus operandi of outlawed gangs than to that of respectable nations. For instance, the first article of the OIC charter establishes the concept of 'unified voting,' whereby the Muslim states must present a unified front and vote together as a bloc. This principle is based on an interpretation of a saying in Arabic, 'Champion the cause of your Muslim brother whether he is oppressor or oppressed.' Given that the Arab and Islamic groups hold 26 out of 53 seats in the HRC... they have much influence and can steer the council in the desired direction."

"If Switzerland, Which Allows the Construction of Mosques and Free Practice of All Religions, is Labeled Racist and Anti-Islamic, We Will Be Hard Pressed to Find an Appropri-

ate Label for the Attitude of Islamic States toward Other Religions"

"The fanatical and disparaging approach of the Arab and Islamic states cast its shadow not only on the Human Rights Council but on several other international organizations and forums as well. However, far more dangerous is their ability to stir up Muslim communities in Europe and incite them to hatred and violence.

"Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abu Al-Gheit played a well-known role in setting off the crisis of the Danish cartoons, and Syria used the incident to spur the rabble to attack foreign embassies in Syria and Lebanon as a warning message to the Western states. This hysterical behaviour recently reached new heights of absurdity when the Swiss Muslim League organized a demonstration in Geneva, on April 19, 2009, to protest Swiss racism! If Switzerland, which allows the construction of mosques and the free practice of all religions, is being labelled a racist country that discriminates against Islam, we will be hard pressed to find an appropriate label for the attitude of Islamic states toward other religions.

"The Arab and Islamic states use a strategy of obfuscation and blackmail to prevent the rest of the world from

discussing problems rampant in Islamic states, such as violence against women; the absence of religious freedom; the distribution of religious texts that promote violence, hatred and the perception of non-Muslims as infidels; discrimination against non-Muslim minorities; the intimidation of intellectuals through threats of imprisonment, murder and confiscation of property; acts of violence against non-Muslims; the use of internationally-proscribed punishments dictated by *shari'a*; child marriages; rape of minors and harassment of non-Muslim women; the integration of religion and state in a way that reinforces a culture of oppression; human rights violations under religious pretexts; the justification of terrorist acts committed by Islamist movements; and the presentation of jihad as a sacred Islamic concept that should be above criticism. (Note that we have yet to see a single *fatwa* issued against bin Laden).

"To conclude, I would like to reiterate an observation of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies regarding the actions of the Arab and Islamic states in the Human Rights Council: 'The Arab states are grouped into political and regional blocs within the HRC. They are most active and influential,

and they are also most determined to manipulate the council's resolutions in order to shield their own governments and the governments of their allies from criticism. The member states of the OIC group and the Arab group are the most vociferous within the African and Asian blocs, and have the advantage of occupying 26 out of a total of 53 seats.'

"When will the world wake up to the danger that awaits the international human rights legacy and the international human rights charters?"

Endnotes:

(1) Magdi Khalil is executive director of the Middle East Freedom Forum, and executive editor of the Egyptian Coptic weekly *Watani International*. A syndicated columnist for several Arabic Language newspapers, he has also authored and co-authored 20 books and numerous articles on the topics of the Middle East, Arab-Western relations, Islamic extremism, and the situation of non-Muslim minorities in Islamic states. He is also a prominent political commentator on a number of Arab satellite channels.

(2) <http://www.elaph.com/Web/ElaphWriter/2009/5/435596.htm>.

The following is a statement issued by the diocese of Magaga and Al Adwa regarding the demolition of a Coptic family's home in the village of Qayat

Written by: His Grace Bishop Aghathon

On the 1st of August 2009, Mr. Khamis Fayeze Nashed laid the foundation for a house on a block of land owned by him and his family. The block of land already contains two homes and a mill. Part of the block is owned by the diocese.

On the 16th of August Mr. Nashed was summoned to the police station at Sheikh Massoud, Al Adwa to sign a declaration that he is building a residential home and the building will not be used as a church, and that it cannot be sold or donated to the diocese at any time.

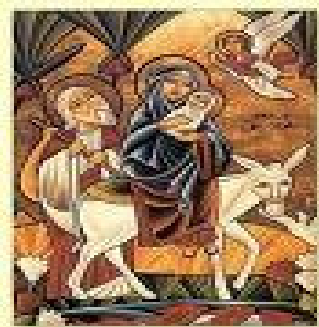
After signing the declaration Mr. Nashed continued building the home until September 17th, when the building was suddenly demolished by the authorities. The demolition came after rumours spread in the village that the building was to be used for prayers.

During the demolition of the building, Mr. Nashed and another family member were detained by the authorities to prevent any objections by the family against this injustice.

Mr. Nashed and his family are now pursuing the matter through the legal channels. We pray that the Lord save His children from persecution, and we ask the authorities to see that justice is served.



Source : Free Copts



Problems on hold: Persecution of Copts

Last week I tackled the grievances of the Copts of the parish of Maghagha and Adawa in Minya, Upper Egypt, regarding the building and renovation of places of worship. I cited two cases of flagrant discrimination against Copts in this respect, and showed that the unjust manner in which Coptic congregations are deprived of their right to decent churches or buildings that house community services amounts to no less than 'persecution'. Today I resume citing the cases of persecution inflicted upon the Copts of Maghagha and Adawa.

The church of the Holy Virgin and the archangel Gabriel in the village of Safaniya in Adawa has no toilets. Apart from the fact that depriving people of toilets is hideously inhuman, how are old persons, diabetics, or children expected to relieve themselves? It is an utter disgrace for this country that such a problem should occur so frequently where churches are concerned. In principle, how can a building be erected without toilets? And even if those in charge of the building for some inexplicable reason overlooked the building of toilets then decided to correct the error later, why should they be denied a permit to do that? What justification does any official have to negotiate the matter as though it were not necessary, to delay licensing the building of the toilets, or to bargain against that? Did we ever hear about a mosque built without toilets or facilities for ablution? If anything, this proves that representatives of the administration or authorities are the main source of the grievances and vexation to which Copts are subjected. Worse, the message propagated to the public is that it is perfectly all right to harass the Copts, a message easily picked up and put into effect by ignorant people and fanatics. Then we ask ourselves what could be the reason for the sectarian inflammation we suffer from.

By: Youseef Sidhom



Back to the appalling problem of the Safaniya church. In January 2006 the church officially applied to Minya governor for a permit to build toilets. It is today close to four years since the application was submitted and still no permit. It goes without saying that if those in charge of the church had the temerity to go ahead and build the toilets anyway, all the gates of hell would break loose. The Copts would be accused of conducting illegal construction, a Muslim mob would attack the church and assault the Copts in the neighbourhood, and the church would be promptly closed by the security authorities on the pretext that it has become the cause of sectarian violence. Next, the authorities would predictably don the wings of angels and engineer a 'reconciliation' between the Copts and Muslims. The scenario is all too familiar.

In Nazlet Ramadan, Adawa, the church of the Archangel Michael faces another problem which is also four years old...

and going. The church is small and old; one of its walls was built in mud brick and is now deteriorated and near-collapse. Since the congregation has swelled over the years, those in charge of the church applied to Minya authorities for permission to replace the mud brick wall with a modern brick one and to add a second floor to the present building. Again, four years on, no permit has been approved. Whenever the church authorities follow up the matter with Minya governorate they are told: "We have no reply from Cairo". Given that permits for renovation and restoration should be approved by the local governors not by Cairo, the referral of the application to Cairo for approval is a grave misstep. The fact that Cairo has given no reply in the span of four years is a graver misstep. But if the application was never referred to Cairo in the first place and officials are merely making this story up to sideline the matter, we are before a crime that warrants questioning and accountability.

These two incidents plus the two others presented in last week's editorial, in addition to other cases which I plan to print in future articles, prove beyond doubt that the collective penalty inflicted on Copts amounts to definite persecution. Trouble is that the persecution of Copts is denied by officials and the public, left unchecked, placed on hold, then the same officials and public rise in shock and alarm once someone dares utter the phrase "persecution of Copts".

To Join and support UCGB

To Join the United Copts of Great Britain Write to :

E-mail: info@unitedcopts.org

Or log on <http://www.unitedcopts.org/content/view/391/118/>

And fill the form Or speak to Tel: 07976710729

To Support United Copts of Great Britain:

You can fill in the Standing Order attached or log on

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