

The statement / intervention to WGM 2005
Freedom of Religion

While the Egyptian constitution provides for freedom of religion in articles 40 and 46, yet Article 2 stipulates that Islam is the religion of the State and Sharia is the primary source of legislation, rendering Articles 40 and 46 subordinate to Islamic Sharia law, subsequently non-Muslims are treated as second class citizens. The state duty is to defend its citizen's rights not citizen's good. For the State to assume any moral or religious stand based on the majority's belief would immediately encroach on minority's rights and casts great doubt on the state as neutral body.

While the Egyptian government has a prescribed procedure and official recognition under the Egyptian law for a non-Muslim to convert to Islam, there is no similar process for the reverse i. e for a Muslim to become non-Muslim, which contravenes the Freedom of Belief according to Article 18. Universal Declaration of Human Rights "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.". The lack of conversion procedure from Islam creates endless difficulties and hardship for Muslim converts.

Also there is restriction on building places of worship for non-Muslims, permissions to build new churches are restricted and obtained if any with great difficulties, for example in Manqateen village, Samalout district there are 5000 Christians live with out church so far, the local people started to build their church in 1978 when Islamic fundamentalists attacked the church under construction, the police then stopped the building till now for security reasons. Local Christians have to conduct their weddings and funeral services in the village streets with no dignity. Photographs of the desecrated church and the street weddings are provided.

There are cases of forced conversion of underage Christian girls where police side with the kidnapper and does not hand back the minor to her family, under Egyptian law a female can't marry without her family consent under the age of 21.

I would like to recommend the following:

1. The Egyptian government should extend the freedom of conversion procedure to cover conversion from **any** religion including Islam.

2. The Egyptian Police should not be involved in the conversion process, but rather a civil religious committee from both sides.
3. Removal of all indication to one's religion from the Identity cards and the official papers.
4. To change second article of the Egyptian constitution to provide equality to all Egyptian citizens.