



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Egypt

Egypt – EGY38986 – Coptic Christians –
State Protection – Employment

26 July 2011

1. Deleted.

2. Are there any reports which suggest that police will fail to act in relation to crimes against Coptic Christians and would falsify reports about such crimes?

Reports from a range of sources state that police in Egypt are often slow to react to, or fail to investigate, crimes against Coptic Christians, and that this situation is unchanged in light of the recent political upheaval there. There are also reports that police falsify reports regarding violence against Coptic Christians, forcing victims to change their statements or drop their complaints.

A range of reports claim that despite an increase in violent attacks on Christians by Muslims in recent years, the authorities failed to investigate many incidents.¹ Instead, the Egyptian authorities often sponsored ‘reconciliation sessions’ which the US Department of State (US DOS) claims ‘obviated the prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against Copts and precluded their recourse to the judicial system for restitution. This practice contributed to a climate of impunity that encouraged further assaults’.² For example, on 5 October 2008, the Minya Criminal Court sentenced a Muslim assailant who stabbed a Copt to death to a one-year suspended sentence following a reconciliation session at which the family of the killer promised to pay indemnity to the victim’s family.³ Similarly, the 2010 US DOS International Religious Freedom Report stated that the authorities failed to prosecute perpetrators of violence against Coptic Christians in a number of cases including in Baghoura, Farshout, and Marsa Matruh.⁴

Post-Mubarak

¹ Human Rights Watch 2010, *World Report – Egypt*, January, p.4 <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/87709> – Accessed 22 January 2010 – Attachment 2; US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Egypt*, 17 November, Section II – Abuses of Religious Freedom www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148817.htm – Accessed 20 July 2011 – Attachment 3; The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (undated), *The Situation of Freedom of Religion and Belief in Egypt*, para 9-13 <http://www.cihrs.org/Images/ArticleFiles/Original/423.pdf> – Accessed 25 July 2011 – Attachment 4; United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2011, *USCIRF Annual Report 2011 – Countries of Particular Concern: Egypt*, UNHCR website, 28 April <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4dbe90c4c.html> – Accessed 20 July 2011 – Attachment 5

² US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Egypt*, 17 November, Introduction – Attachment 3.

³ US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report 2009 – Egypt*, September, Section III – Attachment 6.

⁴ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November, Introduction www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148817.htm – Accessed 20 July 2011 – Attachment 3.

Sources also report that police and military forces have failed to adequately protect Christians and their property from recent attacks in the post-Mubarak period.⁵ The 2011 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) report concludes that ‘the Egyptian authorities have failed to protect religious minorities, particularly Coptic Christians, from violent attacks, including during the transitional period when minority communities are increasingly vulnerable’. Since Mubarak’s resignation, religious freedom conditions have not improved and attacks targeting Coptic Christians have risen.⁶

The National Review Online claims that during an arson attack on a Coptic church in Sol on 5 March 2011, ‘the fire department and security forces failed to respond to Coptic pleas for help...’⁷ During the subsequent Cairo demonstrations over the attack in Sol, the USCIRF cites reports which claim that the Egyptian military ‘stood by for as long as four hours without intervening in the clashes’.⁸

The transitional authorities have also been criticised for failing to protect Christians during violence in Imbaba, Cairo in May 2011 in which several churches were attacked. The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) conducted an investigation into the attacks, concluding that there was a ‘clear dereliction of duty on the part of the security apparatus’.⁹ The EIPR investigation found:

The authorities’ response to the attacks reveals a continued failure of the security apparatus to deal with sectarian crises. The police knew in advance that groups of Salafis had assembled in front of the Mar Mina Church in Imbaba, but they failed to anticipate the events – despite evidence suggesting the potential for violence two or more hours before clashes erupted – and in turn failed to prevent the violence.¹⁰

The EIPR gathered testimonies claiming that no army forces were present to secure the Virgin Mary Church in Imbaba after the police charged with guarding the facility fled upon the assailants’ arrival. The EIPR states that, despite there being several indications that groups of Muslims would attempt to attack other churches in the area, and despite the heavy presence of army and police forces on the main street, neither body deployed their forces around the other churches, which facilitated the burning of the Virgin Mary Church.¹¹

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) corroborated some of these findings, stating that the army ‘was deployed on the scene but did not intervene in the clashes’ in Imbaba.

⁵ International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) 2011, *Escalation of inter-confessional violence in Egypt*, 9 May – Attachment 7; United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2011, *Annual Report 2011*, May, p.49 <http://www.uscirtf.gov/images/book%20with%20cover%20for%20web.pdf> – Accessed 27 June 2011 – Attachment 5; Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2011, *EIPR Releases Findings of Field Investigation into Imbaba Events*, 14 May <http://www.eipr.org/en/pressrelease/2011/05/14/1166> – Accessed 27 June 2011 – Attachment 9.

⁶ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2011, *Annual Report 2011*, May, p.53 <http://www.uscirtf.gov/images/book%20with%20cover%20for%20web.pdf> – Accessed 27 June 2011 – Attachment 8.

⁷ Shea, N. 2011, ‘Egypt’s Copts suffer more attacks’, *The National Review Online*, 5 March <http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/261405/egypt-s-copts-suffer-more-attacks-nina-shea> – Accessed 27 June 2011 – Attachment 10.

⁸ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2011, *Annual Report 2011*, May, p.53 <http://www.uscirtf.gov/images/book%20with%20cover%20for%20web.pdf> – Accessed 27 June 2011 – Attachment 8.

⁹ Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2011, *EIPR Releases Findings of Field Investigation into Imbaba Events*, 14 May <http://www.eipr.org/en/pressrelease/2011/05/14/1166> – Accessed 28 June 2011 – Attachment 9.

¹⁰ Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2011, *EIPR Releases Findings of Field Investigation into Imbaba Events*, 14 May <http://www.eipr.org/en/pressrelease/2011/05/14/1166> – Accessed 28 June 2011 – Attachment 9.

¹¹ Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2011, *EIPR Releases Findings of Field Investigation into Imbaba Events*, 14 May <http://www.eipr.org/en/pressrelease/2011/05/14/1166> – Accessed 28 June 2011 – Attachment 9

This ‘calls into question the ability of the army and the police to ensure the protection of the population’, according to FIDH’s member organisation in Egypt.¹²

Police Falsifying Reports

A number of reports claim government authorities are known to detain Copts following sectarian attacks in order to blackmail Coptic authorities into dropping their complaints and calls for prosecutions.¹³ For example, the US Copts Association claimed that in July 2009, after a Coptic church had been set on fire by ‘Muslim extremists’, three Christian villagers filed a report at the police station. The police officers reportedly detained and threatened the Christians to change their statements.¹⁴ In August 2009, *Compass Direct News* also reported that two Coptic Christians were arrested by police and held without charge after reporting that they had been beaten by a mob.¹⁵ After filing a police report, the two men were arrested ‘on orders of Egypt’s State Security Investigations, a political police force run by the Interior minister... for ‘security reasons’, a euphemism commonly used under Egypt’s longstanding Emergency Law [which] allows authorities to hold people without charge’.¹⁶

The US Department of State report on international religious freedom for 2010 describes the arrest and detention without charge of two Coptic Christians accused of involvement in the death of a Muslim villager following an assault on a monastery by a group of Muslim villagers in May 2008. According to US DOS, reports argued that ‘the two coptic [*sic*] brothers were being detained to pressure Coptic authorities not to press for official prosecution of the perpetrators’ of the assault:

Human rights advocates reported that this instance exemplifies an increasingly prevalent pattern of governmental authorities detaining Copts following sectarian attacks and either holding them without charges or threatening false charges and a police record; the detentions serve as a tool to blackmail Coptic authorities to desist from calling for official action to prosecute the perpetrators, and to dissuade the victims and/or their families from seeking recourse in the judicial system for restitution of damages.¹⁷

The 2009 US DOS human rights report, released on 11 March 2010, explains that the two Coptic Christian brothers were released without charge on 20 August 2009 ‘after an agreement was reached in which the monastery dropped criminal charges against the attackers’.¹⁸

According to a Front Page Magazine article, the Assyrian International News Agency (AINA) states that ‘arresting Copts after every attack against Copts “is the usual scenario”’. Discussing the arrest of Coptic Christian teenage boys following an attack on Mar Yohana (St. John’s)

¹² International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) 2011, *Escalation of inter-confessional violence in Egypt*, 9 May – Attachment 7.

¹³ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Egypt*, 17 November, Section II www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148817.htm – Accessed 20 July 2011 – Attachment 3; ‘EGYPT: Egyptian Church Set on Fire as Gov’t Guards Stand By’ 2009, U.S. Copts Association website, 14 July – Attachment 11; ‘Two Copts in Egypt Imprisoned after Reporting Attack’ 2009, *Compass Direct News*, 20 August <http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/egypt/4818/> – Accessed 25 July 2011 – Attachment 12.

¹⁴ ‘EGYPT: Egyptian Church Set on Fire as Gov’t Guards Stand By’ 2009, U.S. Copts Association website, 14 July – Attachment 11.

¹⁵ ‘Two Copts in Egypt Imprisoned after Reporting Attack’ 2009, *Compass Direct News*, 20 August <http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/egypt/4818/> – Accessed 15 March 2010 – Attachment 12

¹⁶ ‘Two Copts in Egypt Imprisoned after Reporting Attack’ 2009, *Compass Direct News*, 20 August <http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/egypt/4818/> – Accessed 15 March 2010 – Attachment 12.

¹⁷ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Egypt*, 17 November – Attachment 3.

¹⁸ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Egypt*, 11 March, Section 2c – Attachment 13.

Church in Nag Hammadi, Upper Egypt on 6 January 2010, during which eight Christians and one Muslim were killed; AINA states that '[h]olding Christians from Nag Hammadi without charges... is the security services' 'balancing act' to pressure the church to drop the charges against the Muslim perpetrators in exchange for setting the boys free. The arrest of the Coptic teenagers was meant to pressure Bishop Kirolos into recanting his past statements on the role of State Security in the attacks'.¹⁹

3. What percentage of the population in Heliopolis are Coptic Christians?

No information was found indicating the percentage of the population of Heliopolis which are Coptic Christian. One unverified internet source noted that the neighbourhood has a large Christian minority.²⁰

4. Is there any information about discrimination in the employment of Coptic Christians in universities and in particular whether there are Coptic Christians working at MUST?

Information suggests there is discrimination against Coptic Christians in public sector employment including at public universities. No information was found regarding the employment of Coptic Christians at Misr University of Science and Technology (MUST). As MUST is a private university the aforementioned information may not be applicable.

The US DOS human rights report for 2010 states the following regarding discrimination in University employment:

The constitution provides for equal public rights and duties without discrimination based on religion or creed; however, the government discriminates against non-Muslims.

There were no Christians serving as presidents or deans of the country's 17 public universities. Of nearly 700 president, dean, or vice dean positions in the country's public university system, only one or two positions were filled by Christians.

The government discriminates against Christians in public sector hiring and staff appointments to public universities, and bars them from studying at Al-Azhar University, a publicly funded institution with approximately half a million students. In general, the government bars non-Muslims from employment in public university training programs for Arabic language teachers because the curriculum involves study of the Qur'an.²¹

Freedom House's 2011 report indicates that academic life in Egypt is strictly controlled by the Government and security apparatus. The report states:

Academic freedom is limited. Senior university officials are appointed by the government, and the security services reportedly influence academic appointments,

¹⁹ McDonnell, F. J. H. 2010, 'Egypt's Christians In Peril', *Front Page Magazine*, 16 February <http://frontpagemag.com/2010/02/16/egypt%E2%80%99s-christians-in-peril/> – Accessed 16 March 2010 – Attachment 14.

²⁰ 'Neighbourhoods' in 'Cairo' (undated), Jiffynotes website http://www.jiffynotes.com/a_study_guides/book_notes/jwwc_01/jwwc_01_00016.html – Accessed 25 July 2011 – Attachment 15.

²¹ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010*, 17 November, Section II www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148817.htm – Accessed 20 July 2011 – Attachment 3.

censor the curriculum, and monitor classroom discussion. University professors and students have been prosecuted for political and human rights advocacy outside of the classroom.²²

²² Freedom House 2011, Freedom in the World 2011 – Egypt, 26 May, http://www.freedomhouse.org/inc/content/pubs/fiw/inc_country_detail.cfm?year=2011&country=8031&pf – Accessed 25 July 2011 – Attachment 16.

Attachments

1. Deleted.
2. Human Rights Watch 2010, *World Report – Egypt*, January <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/87709> – Accessed 22 January 2010.
3. US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report 2010 – Egypt*, 17 November www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148817.htm – Accessed 20 July 2011.
4. The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (undated), *The Situation of Freedom of Religion and Belief in Egypt*, para 9-13 <http://www.cihrs.org/Images/ArticleFiles/Original/423.pdf> – Accessed 25 July 2011.
5. United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2011, *USCIRF Annual Report 2011 – Countries of Particular Concern: Egypt*, UNHCR website, 28 April <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4dbe90c4c.html> – Accessed 20 July 2011.
6. US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report 2009 – Egypt*, September.
7. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) 2011, *Escalation of inter-confessional violence in Egypt*, 9 May.
8. United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2011, *Annual Report 2011*, May <http://www.uscirf.gov/images/book%20with%20cover%20for%20web.pdf> – Accessed 27 June 2011.
9. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2011, *EIPR Releases Findings of Field Investigation into Imbaba Events*, 14 May <http://www.eipr.org/en/pressrelease/2011/05/14/1166> – Accessed 27 June 2011.
10. Shea, N. 2011, 'Egypt's Copts suffer more attacks', *The National Review Online*, 5 March <http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/261405/egypt-s-copts-suffer-more-attacks-nina-shea> – Accessed 27 June 2011.
11. 'EGYPT: Egyptian Church Set on Fire as Gov't Guards Stand By' 2009, U.S. Copts Association website, 14 July.
12. 'Two Copts in Egypt Imprisoned after Reporting Attack' 2009, *Compass Direct News*, 20 August <http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/egypt/4818/> – Accessed 25 July 2011.
13. US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Egypt*, 11 March.
14. McDonnell, F. J. H. 2010, 'Egypt's Christians In Peril', *Front Page Magazine*, 16 February <http://frontpagemag.com/2010/02/16/egypt%E2%80%99s-christians-in-peril/> – Accessed 16 March 2010.
15. 'Neighbourhoods' in 'Cairo' (undated), Jiffynotes website http://www.jiffynotes.com/a_study_guides/book_notes/jwwc_01/jwwc_01_00016.html – Accessed 25 July 2011.

16. Freedom House 2011, *Freedom in the World 2011 – Egypt*, 26 May, http://www.freedomhouse.org/inc/content/pubs/fiw/inc_country_detail.cfm?year=2011&country=8031&pf – Accessed 25 July 2011.