



Country Information and Guidance

Egypt: Christians

Preface

This document provides guidance to Home Office decision makers on handling claims made by nationals/residents of - as well as country of origin information (COI) about Egypt. This includes whether claims are likely to justify the granting of asylum, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave and whether - in the event of a claim being refused - it is likely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under s94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers must consider claims on an individual basis, taking into account the case specific facts and all relevant evidence, including: the guidance contained with this document; the available COI; any applicable caselaw; and the Home Office casework guidance in relation to relevant policies.

Within this instruction, links to specific guidance are those on the Home Office's internal system. Public versions of these documents are available at <https://www.gov.uk/immigration-operational-guidance/asylum-policy>.

Country Information

The COI within this document has been compiled from a wide range of external information sources (usually) published in English. Consideration has been given to the relevance, reliability, accuracy, objectivity, currency, transparency and traceability of the information and wherever possible attempts have been made to corroborate the information used across independent sources, to ensure accuracy. All sources cited have been referenced in footnotes. It has been researched and presented with reference to the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the [European Asylum Support Office's research guidelines, Country of Origin Information report methodology](#), dated July 2012.

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve the guidance and information we provide. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this document, please email: CPI@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

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It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy.

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1. Guidance

Updated 30 June 2014

1.1 Use of Terms

1.1.1 The term 'Coptic' is used to describe all Egyptian Christians. This includes members of the Coptic Orthodox church but extends, amongst other denominations, to evangelicals and Catholics. For the purposes of this guidance, where the term 'Copt' or 'Coptic' is used it is a collective term for the above, unless explicitly mentioned otherwise.

[See COI Christians – General overview](#)

1.2 Basis of claim

1.2.1 Ill treatment amounting to persecution at the hands of the state or non-state actors due to their Christian religion.

1.3 Summary of issues

- Is the person a Christian?
- Is the person at real risk from the Egyptian authorities and/or non-state actors due to their religious beliefs/faith?
- Is the person able to seek effective protection?
- Is the persons able to internally relocate within Egypt to escape that risk?

1.4 Consideration of issues

Is the person a Christian?

1.4.1 Decision makers should establish where the person is from in Egypt and consider whether the person's account of their religious background and of their experiences as a Christian is both internally consistent as well as being externally credible (i.e. consistent with the country information).

1.4.2 Decision makers should research the issues raised in a claim and ask relevant questions. Supporting documentation and correspondence must also be taken into account if submitted.

See Asylum Instructions on [Considering the asylum claim and assessing credibility](#) and also the process guidance on [interviewing/assessing the claim](#)

Is the person at real risk from the Egyptian authorities and/or non state actors due to their religious beliefs?

1.4.3 The existing law allows for Christians to practice their faith. While the new constitution of January 2014 includes improvements regarding freedom of religion or belief, the interpretation and implementation of relevant provisions have yet to be seen. Some discriminatory and repressive laws and

See [country information](#)

policies that restrict freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief remain in place and there is no mention of the right to change one's religion or belief.

- 1.4.4 In the period that President Morsi was in power (June 2012 to July 2013) there were virtually no incidents of active state persecution in the form of attacks against Copts, although there were incidents of unjustified convictions and political use of the blasphemy laws. During this period and that following President Morsi's removal from power there was a pattern of state complicity or inaction in the face of attacks made against Christians by non state actors (Country Guidance case, [MS](#), paragraph 115).
- 1.4.5 Christians have faced personal and collective societal discrimination, especially in government employment and the ability to build, renovate, and repair places of worship. In recent years levels of violence and ill-treatment by non state actors have become more overt and increasingly severe, including lethal sectarian attacks, mob violence and vigilantism. Following the overthrow of President Morsi's government, Christians, their homes and business, churches and other Christian religious institutions were targeted in revenge attacks by pro-Morsi supporters.
- 1.4.6 In [MS](#), the Upper Tribunal (UT) found that while the levels of violence against Copts had risen in the immediate aftermath of the ousting of President Morsi, they are not, nor likely to be for the foreseeable future, at such a level as to cause Copts to be at real risk of persecution and serious harm. It noted that figures of deaths, woundings, attacks on churches and Coptic Christian homes are concerning but limited in scale and intensity relative to the size of the population and relative to the number of Copts. The UT also noted that the preponderance of attacks took place in Upper Egypt and in areas in which radical Islamists have a strong presence ([MS](#), paragraph 130).
- 1.4.7 The UT concluded that Coptic Christians in Egypt are not at a general risk of persecution or ill-treatment contrary to Article 3, ECHR ([MS](#), paragraph 151(1)).
- 1.4.8 In considering the position of Christian women, the UT found that they are not in general at real risk of persecution or ill-treatment, although they face difficulties additional to other women, in the form of sometimes being the target of disappearances, forced abduction and forced conversion. However, depending on the particular circumstances of the case, Coptic Christian women aged between 14-25 years who lack a male protector, may be at risk of persecution. ([MS](#), paragraph 150)
- 1.4.9 However the UT did find that there are some areas in Egypt where Coptic Christians will face a real risk of persecution or ill-

See [caselaw](#)

See [country information](#)

See also [Egypt OGN](#), December 2013, Women

treatment contrary to Article 3. In general these will be:

- (a) areas outside the large cities;
- (b) where radical Islamists have a strong foothold; and
- (c) where there have been recent attacks on Coptic Christians or their churches, businesses or properties. (MS, paragraph 151 (2)).

1.4.10 Additionally, the UT considered that the following categories of Christian will generally be able to show a real risk of persecution or treatment contrary to Article 3 of the ECHR, at least in their home areas:

- (i) converts to Coptic Christianity;
- (ii) persons who are involved in construction or reconstruction/repair of churches that have been the target for an attack or attacks;
- (iii) those accused of proselytising where the accusation is serious and not casual;
- (iv) those accused of being physically or emotionally involved with a Muslim woman where the accusation is made seriously and not casually (MS, paragraph 151(3)).

Is a Christian able to seek effective protection?

1.4.11 In MS (paragraph 151(1)) the Upper Tribunal found that there was inadequate state protection for Coptic Christians.

Is a Christian able to internally relocate within Egypt to escape persecution?

1.4.12 Even if a person is able to establish that they come from an area where the local Coptic population faces a real risk of persecution or that they fall with one of the risk categories listed above, they will not qualify as a refugee if they have a viable internal relocation alternative.

1.4.13 In general, a Christian will be able to relocate to an area where Islamists are not strong. For example, large cities such as Cairo or Alexandria. However each case will need to be considered on its individual facts (MS, paragraph 139).

1.4.14 There is no legal impediment to internal movement within Egypt, including for single women, and Copts do relocate for a variety of economic and social reasons. Some Egyptian Copts have internally relocated because of sectarian tension either voluntarily or as a result of reconciliation committees. If means allow, families will usually help with finding shelter and financial assistance. The church can also sometimes assist. It has been

See [country information](#) and [Egypt OGN](#), December 2013, Actors of protection

See also [Egypt OGN](#), December 2013, Internal relocation

See [Asylum Instructions: Internal Relocation](#)

See [country information](#)

reported that rural and poor Coptic women will find it more difficult to find shelter and employment. Women, and especially single women, with no support network could be vulnerable and may be subjected to destitution.

See [country information](#)

1.4.15 Reconciliation committees are sometimes imposed on people by the police and these committees will often arrange relocation and protection from further attacks for the Christians involved. However reconciliation sessions have been abused by local authorities and Muslim and Christian religious leaders to compel victims to abandon their claims to any legal remedy, contributing to a climate of impunity.

See [country information](#)

1.4.16 There is also a large movement of Copts and other Egyptians to live in cities for economic reasons with some Copts from the poorer parts of Upper Egypt moving to the north coast of the country for better opportunities.

1.4.17 In considering whether or not a person may internally relocate, decision makers must take into account the particular circumstances of the person, the nature of the threat and how far it would extend, and whether or not it would be unduly harsh to expect the person to relocate. This should include consideration of the age, gender, health, ethnicity, religion, financial circumstances and support network of the claimant, as well as the security, human rights and socio-economic conditions in the proposed area of relocation, including the claimant's ability to sustain themselves.

See [Asylum Instructions: Internal Relocation](#)

1.5 Policy Summary

Although Christians do face personal and collective societal discrimination and repeated instances of sectarian violence, Christians in Egypt are not in general at risk of persecution or ill-treatment contrary to Article 3, ECHR. However, in areas outside the main cities, where Islamists have a strong foothold, and where there have been attacks on Christians, against their property, businesses and churches, Christians will generally be at risk, particularly as the state is generally unable or unwilling to provide adequate protection.

Additionally, people falling within the following risk categories will generally be able to show a real risk of persecution or treatment contrary to Article 3 of the ECHR, at least in their home areas:

- (i) converts to Christianity;**
- (ii) persons who are involved in construction/repair of churches that have been the target of an attack;**
- (iii) those accused of proselytising where the accusation is serious and not casual;**
- (iv) those accused of being physically or emotionally involved with a Muslim woman, where the accusation is serious and not**

See asylum process guidance on [Non suspensive appeals certification under section 94 of the NIA Act 2002](#)

casual;

(v) girls/women aged 14-25 without a male protector in their home area.

Where a Christian is considered at risk, in general they will be able to relocate to an area where Islamists are not strong – subject to decision makers considering the relevance and reasonableness of internal relocation, taking full account of the specific facts of the case and the individual circumstances of the particular claimant.

Where a claim falls to be refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

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2. Information

Updated 30 June 2014

2.1. Overview

- 2.1.1 Sources use the term 'Christians', 'Coptic Christians' and 'Copts' interchangeably. These should be interpreted as in general referring to the Christian population in Egypt, not just Coptic Christians.
- 2.1.2 The Coptic Network 'Encyclopedia Coptica' states that the modern use of the term 'Coptic' describes Egyptian Christians.¹ Christianity Today noted that it is generally understood that as 'the Christians of Egypt', Copts comprise Orthodox, evangelicals, and Catholics. In the same article Mark Nygard, director of graduate studies at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, explained that "Copts are the historical Orthodox Church of Egypt. It is a fuzzy term, but strictly speaking it refers to those under the [Orthodox] pope's authority". Dr Atef Gendy, president of the seminary added, "The accurate definition of Coptic is the ethnic identity of Christians of Egypt, but the common understanding is of the Orthodox, due to their status as the oldest church." The article noted that around 90% of Christians in Egypt belong to the Orthodox church.²
- 2.1.3 Approximately 90 percent of the Egyptian population (estimated to be around 87million³) is Sunni Muslim and about 10 percent (around 8 to 9 million) is Christian. Christians live throughout the country, although the percentage of Christians is higher in Upper Egypt and in some sections of Cairo and Alexandria.⁴ Minority Rights Group International, in their 2013 report, No change in sight: the situation of religious minorities in post-Mubarak Egypt, reports that Copts are the largest minority in Egypt, though their exact numbers remain uncertain. The report also states that some consider that the Copts are not necessarily an actual 'minority', arguing that on the criteria of citizenship and their continuing presence in the country that they are an integral part of the Egyptian majority. The late Orthodox Pope Shenouda, described Copts as "part and parcel of the Egyptian nation". Nevertheless, the Coptic minority has experienced ongoing discrimination, marginalization, restricted religious freedoms and physical insecurity through successive periods of Egypt's recent history.⁵

2.2. Legal rights

- 2.2.1 The 2014 constitution guarantees Christians certain rights. With regards to freedom of religion it states:

¹ Coptic Network Encyclopedia Coptica, last updated January 2006, <http://www.coptic.net/EncyclopediaCoptica/> Accessed 21 February 2014

² Christianity Today, Who are the Copts? 15 June 2012 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/juneweb-only/who-are-copts.html> Accessed 6 May 2014

³ CIA World Fact book, Egypt (People and Society) updated 15 April 2014 <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html> Accessed 22 April 2014

⁴ US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2012: Egypt, 20 May 2013, Section I. Religious Demography, Accessed 5 February 2014

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dliid=208386>

⁵ Minority Rights Group International. No change in sight: the situation of religious minorities in post-Mubarak Egypt. 9 December 2013, <http://www.minorityrights.org/download.php?id=1314> Accessed 5 February 2014

Article (2)

'Islam is the religion of the State and Arabic is its official language. The principles of Islamic Sharia are the main source of legislation.

Article (3)

'The principles of Christian and Jewish Sharia of Egyptian Christians and Jews are the main source of legislations that regulate their respective personal status, religious affairs, and selection of spiritual leaders.

Article (53)

'All citizens are equal before the Law. They are equal in rights, freedoms and general duties, without discrimination based on religion, belief, sex, origin, race, color, language, disability, social class, political or geographic affiliation or any other reason. Discrimination and incitement of hatred is a crime punished by Law. The State shall take necessary measures for eliminating all forms of discrimination, and the Law shall regulate creating an independent commission for this purpose

Article 64:

'Freedom of belief is absolute.

'The freedom of practicing religious rituals and establishing worship places for the followers of Abrahamic religions is a right regulated by Law.'

Article 235:

'In its first legislative term following the effective date of this Constitution, the House of Representatives shall issue a law to regulate constructing and renovating churches, in a manner that guarantees the freedom to practice religious rituals for Christians.'

Article 244:

'The State shall endeavor that youth, Christians, persons with disability and Egyptians living abroad be appropriately represented in the first House of Representatives to be elected after this Constitution is approved, as regulated by law.'⁶

- 2.2.2 Initial analysis by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) on the then draft constitution notes with regards to Article 64 (wording unchanged) that "Protections for manifesting religion or belief" are limited to "rituals and establishing places of worship," while international standards protect a much broader range of activities and expression. Furthermore, this narrow conception of religious expression is limited to followers of the "revealed religions" (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam), which excludes followers of other religions or beliefs, not to mention atheists and agnostics. Also, there is no mention of the right to change one's religion or belief, or of the right of parents to raise their children consistent with their own religion or belief.'⁷

⁶ Egypt State Information Service, Egypt 2014 Constitution, www.sis.gov.eg/Newvr/Dustor-en001.pdf Accessed 7 June 2014

⁷ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, [Egyptian Constitutional Review Initial Analysis of the](#)

- 2.2.3 The same source further notes that ‘In a positive development, the 2013 draft does not include the 2012 constitution’s blasphemy ban (Article 44, which stated that “insult or abuse of all religious messengers and prophets shall be prohibited.”). However, Article 53 requires that “incitement to hate” must be punishable by law. If this undefined phrase is interpreted to prohibit speech that insults religious beliefs, symbols, or figures, it would in effect be another constitutional blasphemy ban, which would violate the freedoms of religion and expression.’⁸
- 2.2.4 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report 2014 - Countries of Particular Concern: Egypt, (2014 USCIRF), published 30 April 2014 noted:
 ‘Article 98(f) of the Egyptian Penal Code prohibits citizens from "ridiculing or insulting heavenly religions [Christianity, Islam and Judaism] or inciting sectarian strife."
 Authorities use this blasphemy law to detain, prosecute, and imprison members of religious groups whose practices deviate from mainstream Islamic beliefs or whose activities are alleged to jeopardize "communal harmony" or insult Judaism, Christianity, or Islam.’⁹
- 2.2.5 The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Annual Report 2013 (covering 31 January 2012 to 31 January 2013), also noted: ‘Other provisions of the penal code also address various forms of religious insult. For example, Article 161 prohibits the printing and dissemination of deliberately distorted religious texts for state-protected religions (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism), and also criminalizes the mocking or ridicule of religious ceremonies in public. Article 176 punishes public incitement and holding a religious community in hatred or contempt.’¹⁰

Prosecutions for blasphemy and defamation of religion

- 2.2.6 The 2013 USCIRF goes on to note that during the transition, there has been an increase of “contempt of religion” cases affecting both Muslims and Coptic Christians.¹¹
- 2.2.7 The report gave further detail:
 ‘In October 2011, a Cairo criminal court sentenced Ayman Yousef Mansour, a Christian, to three years in prison for insulting Islam and the Prophet Muhammad on a Facebook page he allegedly created. His 2012 appeal was rejected and he remains in prison. Gamal Abdou Masoud, a 17-year-old Coptic Christian youth, was sentenced to three years’ imprisonment in January 2012 reportedly because he was tagged on Facebook in a picture that allegedly criticized the Prophet Muhammad. In September 2012, an Egyptian court upheld the conviction and three-year prison sentence for Coptic teacher

Provisions on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Related Rights in the December 2013 Egyptian Draft Constitution, December 2013 Accessed 15 July 2014

⁸ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Egyptian Constitutional Review Initial Analysis of the Provisions on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Related Rights in the December 2013 Egyptian Draft Constitution, December 2013 Accessed 15 July 2014

⁹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2014 - Countries of Particular Concern: Egypt, 30 April 2014, <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Egypt%202014.pdf> Accessed 12 May 2014

¹⁰ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2013 - Countries of Particular Concern: Egypt, 30 April 2013, <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/Egypt%202013.pdf>

¹¹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2013 - Countries of Particular Concern: Egypt, 30 April 2013, <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/Egypt%202013.pdf>

Bishoy Kameel for posting cartoons defaming the Prophet Muhammad on Facebook. In December, an Egyptian court convicted and sentenced to three years in prison atheist activist Alber Saber on extremism charges for his posting of online content that allegedly "insulted God and cast doubt on the books of the Abrahamic religions" and "denied the existence of God and his creation of mankind." After Saber's release on appeal, he reportedly fled the country in late January 2013. In November, an Egyptian court convicted in absentia seven Egyptian expatriate Copts – allegedly associated with the "Innocence of Muslims" online film – and sentenced them to death for harming national unity, insulting and publicly attacking Islam, and spreading false information. The Grand Mufti upheld their death sentences in January 2013. A Salafi cleric, Abu-Islam Ahmed Abdullah, awaits trial for allegedly insulting Christianity and burning a Bible in September 2012.¹²

2.2.8 The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Country Report: Egypt, (DFAT 2014 Egypt report) published 28 January 2014, noted:

'Articles 98(f), 160 and 161 of the Criminal Code (Law 58–1937) prohibit defamation of religion. The law applies to all Egyptians and all recognised religions but in practice disproportionately affects individuals accused of defaming Islam. Before 2011, few people were charged with defamation of religion and, according to local human rights contacts, those charged were usually public figures such as authors, publishers and journalists. However, since the January 2011 revolution, over 70 people have either been charged or tried for defaming religion. In the Egyptian judicial system, members of the public can make accusations about other people directly to authorities... Approximately 60 per cent of those accused of defamation of religion have been Muslim, while the majority of the remainder have been Christian. Most cases have arisen in Upper Egypt, followed by Cairo and then Lower Egypt. Penalties include fines and imprisonment ranging from six months to five years. DFAT is unaware of cases where courts have ordered seizures of property, though sources have spoken of cases where families have had to leave their homes due to threats received as a result of defamation cases. DFAT contacts are not aware of past defamation convictions being quashed, though sentences have been reduced on appeal. DFAT sources have pointed out that high-profile Egyptians (including Christians) usually have their cases dismissed. For example, Naguib Sawiris, a Coptic billionaire, had charges of defaming Islam dropped in March 2012; the charges were initially laid following accusations made by salafi lawyers. Lower-profile Christians are generally convicted. Almost all individuals tried for defamation of religion outside Cairo are convicted.'¹³

2.2.9 The 2014 USCIRF report stated:

'Discriminatory and repressive laws and policies that restrict freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief remain in place. For example, Egyptian courts continue to prosecute, convict, and imprison Egyptian citizens for blasphemy. Both before and after the Morsi era, blasphemy cases continued to be leveled against dissident Muslims and religious minorities. There has been an increase in these cases since 2011. The trend continued in 2013. The bulk of the charges target Sunni Muslim entertainers, prominent personalities, and journalists. Yet the majority of those sentenced by a court to prison terms for blasphemy have been Christians, Shi'a Muslims, and atheists, mostly

¹² [United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2013 - Countries of Particular Concern: Egypt, 30 April 2013 Accessed 11 July 2014](#)

¹³ [Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Country Report: Egypt, 28 January 2014. <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/cgn-egypt.pdf> Accessed 11 July 2014](#)

based on flawed trials. Some 40 percent of the defendants were Christians, a high percentage when compared to the approximately 10-15% Christian population.’¹⁴

2.2.10 Amnesty International (AI) reported in June 2013 that a Luxor court fined a Coptic Christian teacher 100,000 Egyptian pounds (approx. US\$14,000) for allegedly insulting Islam and the Prophet Muhammad during one of her classes. AI also mentioned another case during the same month where a lawyer was also convicted on the charge of “defamation of religion”. A court in Assiut – 360km south of Cairo – sentenced him in absentia to one year in prison, in addition to a 500 Egyptian pounds fine and 10,000 Egyptian pounds (US\$1,400) in compensation to the plaintiffs. The case against him was based on a complaint lodged by two fellow lawyers in Assiut, who accused him of insulting Islam during a private conversation they had with him at the library of the Lawyer’s Syndicate in Assiut in July 2012. ¹⁵

Before the latest two convictions, AI stated it had received numerous recent reports of others accused and convicted of blasphemy in Egypt. Bloggers and media professionals whose ideas are “deemed offensive” as well as Coptic Christians – particularly in Upper Egypt – make up the majority of those targeted. ¹⁶

2.2.11 The International Federation for Human Rights reported that ‘On 5 June [2014], the Court of Appeals in Beba, Beni Seuf, upheld in absentia the sentence against Karam Saber, the head of the Land Center for Human rights, of five years imprisonment on charges of defamation of religion according to article 98 (f) of the penal code.’ It further noted that ‘On 1 June, a Coptic Christian, Kirilis Shawqi Qatas, was also referred to an urgent trial in Luxor on charges of defamation of religion because of online posts on facebook.’¹⁷

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2.3. Violence and discrimination

2.3.1 The US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2012: Egypt, noted that:

‘Minority groups, including Christians, faced personal and collective discrimination, especially in government employment and the ability to build, renovate, and repair places of worship. There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Although lethal sectarian attacks decreased markedly during the year, compelled expulsions and collective punishment increased. Local Islamists also carried out isolated acts of intimidation against some Christians in Upper Egypt, likely leading to fewer Christians voting in some villages in the constitutional referendum in December 2012. Some members of the Muslim Brotherhood suggested that Christians were the only people protesting against President Morsy’s constitutional decree...Discrimination against Christians and other religious minorities, including in government hiring, persisted. The government also failed to redress laws that prevented Copts and other minorities from building and repairing places of worship...Courts

¹⁴ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2014 - Countries of Particular Concern: Egypt, 30 April 2014, , <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Egypt%202014.pdf> Accessed 11 July 2014

¹⁵ Amnesty International, Egypt’s worrying rise in criminal blasphemy cases, 11 June 2013 <http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/news-item/egypt-s-worrying-rise-in-criminal-blasphemy-cases>

¹⁶ Amnesty International, Egypt’s worrying rise in criminal blasphemy cases, 11 June 2013 <http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/news-item/egypt-s-worrying-rise-in-criminal-blasphemy-cases>

¹⁷ International Federation for Human Rights, Egypt: Ongoing crackdown against freedom of expression , 18 June 2014 Accessed 11 July 2014

sometimes sentenced Christians to prison terms that exceeded those given to Muslims accused of the same crime...Christians were discriminated against in government hiring and under-represented in senior government leadership positions, both elected and appointed.’¹⁸

2.3.2 The 2013 USCIRF noted:

‘In addition to violence, Christians – who comprise approximately 10-15% of Egypt’s population – face official and societal discrimination. Although Egyptian government officials claim that there is no law or policy that prevents Christians from holding senior positions, the Coptic Orthodox Christian community faces de facto discrimination in appointments to high-level government and military posts. There are only a few Christians in the upper ranks of the security services and armed forces. There are no Christian governors out of 27 in the country. There were only four Christian members on the Constituent Assembly before their withdrawal from the process. According to the State Department, public university training programs for Arabic-language teachers exclude non-Muslims because the curriculum involves the study of the Qur’an. Under Egyptian law, Muslim men can marry Christian women but Muslim women are prohibited from marrying Christian men. Additionally, neither Coptic men nor Coptic women may marry outside their faith. As a result, marriages between men and women across the two communities are often a source of societal tension between Muslims and Christians in Egypt.’¹⁹

2.3.3 The same report also stated:

‘For all Christian groups, government permission is required to build a new church or repair an existing one, and the approval process continues to be time-consuming and inflexible. In 2005, former President Mubarak devolved authority to approve the renovation and re-construction of churches from the president to the country’s governors. Although several applications were submitted years ago during the Mubarak era, many did not receive a response. Even some permits that had been approved cannot, in fact, be acted upon because of interference by the state security services at both the local and national levels.’²⁰

2.3.4 Amnesty International, in their report, [Egypt: ‘How long are we going to live in this injustice?’: Egypt’s Christians caught between sectarian attacks and state inaction](#), published 9 October 2013, stated:

‘Amnesty International has documented decades of attacks on Christians and other sectarian attacks, including under the rule of Hosni Mubarak, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and Mohamed Morsi. However, there has been a notable increase in sectarian tension and an unprecedented level of attacks since Minister of Defence Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced on 3 July [2013] that Mohamed Morsi was no longer President

¹⁸ US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2012: Egypt, 20 May 2013, Executive summary, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dliid=208386> Accessed 5 February 2014

¹⁹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report 2013: Egypt, Discrimination against Christians, 30 April 2013, <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/Egypt%202013.pdf> Accessed 5 February 2014

²⁰ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report 2013: Egypt, Discrimination against Christians, 30 April 2013 <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/Egypt%202013.pdf> Accessed 5 February 2014

– characterized by security forces' failure to protect Coptic Christian lives, property and places of worship'.²¹

- 2.3.5 The United States Department of State, 2013 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Egypt, published 27 February 2014, noted that religious minorities continued to face discrimination during the year, and there were repeated instances of sectarian violence against Coptic Christians. Christian religious and lay leaders reported that under the Morsi government, local Islamists felt empowered to establish and enforce their own laws.²²
- 2.3.6 In particular, it noted incidents of mob violence and vigilantism during 2013: On 29 June, in which Muslim extremists killed several Copts, destroyed a number of homes and businesses, and forced tens of Coptic families to flee the North Sinai town of al-Arish, according to domestic rights activists. On July 3-4, in the Luxor Governorate village of al-Dabaiya, sectarian clashes resulted in the displacement of approximately 100 Coptic families.²³
- 2.3.7 The report also stated, 'In general, sectarian violence against Christians increased after the July 3 [2013] removal of the Morsy government and the August 14 dispersal of pro-Morsy demonstrators. The Egyptian Center for Public Policy Studies reported 30 churches, 122 shops, and 51 houses owned by Copts were destroyed or burned in Upper Egypt during August. HRW and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights reported at least 42 to 45 churches and other Christian religious institutions were destroyed or damaged.'²⁴
- 2.3.8 The DFAT 2014 Egypt report noted:

'Copts experience low levels of discrimination at the hands of the state. Community prejudice (i.e. "societal discrimination") against Copts is pervasive, but severity varies depending on geographic and socio-economic factors. In middle class urban areas, societal discrimination is low-level and infrequent. In poorer urban and rural areas, where Egyptians tend to be more conservative, discrimination and instances of harassment can be higher. Rural areas generally have lower levels of law and order and higher levels of Islamist activity... Most Copts in both urban and rural areas do not experience harassment in their daily lives and live alongside Muslims across all social classes, genders and backgrounds. Religious identity does not tend to be a factor in day-to-day life. However, underlying sectarian tensions exist and disputes have been known to turn violent.'²⁵

- 2.3.9 The report also noted:

²¹ Amnesty International, Egypt: 'How long are we going to live in this injustice?': Egypt's Christians caught between sectarian attacks and state inaction, 9 October 2013

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE12/058/2013/en> Accessed 24 June 2014

²² United States Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2013 - Egypt, Section 6, 27 February 2014, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220350> Accessed 10 June 2014

²³ United States Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2013 - Egypt, Section 6, 27 February 2014, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220350>

²⁴ United States Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2013 - Egypt, Section 6, 27 February 2014, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220350>

²⁵ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Egyptian Copts, 28 January 2014, 3. Discrimination 3.1-3.2. <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/dfat-tir-egypt.pdf> Accessed 8 April 2014

'The majority of sectarian incidents in recent years have taken place in Upper Egypt governorates, including Beni Suef, Fayoum, Aswan, Assiut, Minya, Luxor and Qena. Of these, the Minya Governorate witnessed the largest number of incidents in the period 2008–2011 and in the period following the dispersal of supporters of former president Mohammed Morsi in August 2013; Minya has both a large Coptic population and a high concentration of Islamist activism'. The report documents recent communal violence, described as "widespread", and "localised" attacks.'²⁶

2.3.10 The USCIRF 2013 also stated that there continued to be claims about Muslim men forcing Coptic Christian women to convert to Islam. However, the report noted that 'such cases are often disputed and include "inflammatory allegations and categorical denials of kidnapping and rape."' During USCIRF's visit, several Christian sources stated that kidnapping of men was more common than kidnapping of women and girls. In addition, in most cases, incidents were not kidnappings but cases of girls converting to Islam voluntarily to marry young Muslim men and then seeking to return to Christianity when the relationship failed. Some reported that the girls' families were shamed by the conversions of their daughters and resorted to claiming kidnapping to hide the situation. Egyptian government officials stated that reporting of such cases was inaccurate and that they typically are the result of feuds between families in Upper Egypt. Nevertheless, some human rights groups continue to assert that there were also cases where Coptic Christian women were lured deceptively into marriages with Muslim men and forced to convert to Islam.²⁷ For information on forced conversions, see [2.3.27 Women](#)

2.3.11 [The Carnegie Endowment Paper: Violence against Copts](#), published 14 November 2013 gives historical and more recent information about the situation for Christians in Egypt.²⁸

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Attacks

2.3.12 In 2013, violent sectarian attacks, targeting primarily Copts, occurred both during and after Morsi's tenure. Clerical supporters of President Morsi and some other extremists often used incendiary, sectarian rhetoric and incitement without consequence or accountability.²⁹ In April [2013], sectarian violence in the town of Khosus left five Christians and one Muslim dead. Two days later, the police failed to intervene to halt clashes that broke out after a funeral at the main Coptic cathedral in Cairo, and at times themselves shot at Christian protesters inside church grounds.³⁰

2.3.13 The situation of Copts remained fragile after the election of President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated FJP [Freedom and Justice Party], as the underlying causes of impunity and government inaction were not adequately addressed. An outbreak of sectarian violence in El-Khosous in April 2013, for example, was officially condemned but in the resulting court case, the most severe sentences - a life sentence and two 15 year terms - were handed down to Copts, even though they also comprised

²⁶ [Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Egyptian Copts, 28 January 2014. Sectarian Tensions, 2.12](#) Accessed 11 July 2014

²⁷ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report 2013: Egypt, Converts and Reconverts to Christianity, 30 April 2013, <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/Egypt%202013.pdf> Accessed 15 May 2014

²⁸ The Carnegie Endowment, Violence against Copts in Egypt, 14 November 2013. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/11/14/violence-against-copts-in-egypt/gtsf#> Accessed 10 June 2014

²⁹ [United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2014 - Countries of Particular Concern: Egypt, 30 April 2014, Accessed 11 July 2014](#)

³⁰ [Human Rights Watch, World Report 2014 – Egypt, 21 January 2014 Accessed 11 July 2014](#)

the great majority of victims. Nine Muslims were also convicted, but on vandalism charges with a maximum sentence of five years. MRGI noted that this trend has continued since Morsi's removal on 3 July 2013, including several attacks on Copts in which churches and homes were burnt. Violent assaults in July and August 2013 left many dead or injured, while security forces have been criticized for failing to prevent these incidents. An attack on a Coptic church in October 2013 left four dead, including an eight-year-old girl.³¹

2.3.14 Amnesty International reported in January 2014 that:

'Sectarian attacks reached an unprecedented level in the wake of dispersals of pro-Morsi sit-ins in Cairo on 14 August 2013. Angry mobs armed with firearms, knives and metal bars ransacked, looted and set ablaze churches and Christian-owned businesses and homes, while security forces stood idly by. Some 200 Christian properties were attacked and 43 churches were seriously damaged across the country. At least four people were killed that day. The Egyptian authorities were quick to label these attacks as "terrorism" and to express outrage, yet they failed to ensure adequate, impartial and independent investigations, including into the failure of security forces to prevent and stop these attacks. They have yet to provide justice and reparation to the victims. Even though some leaders of the MB [Muslim Brotherhood] disassociated themselves from the violence; others used platforms such as Rabaa al-Adawiya to incite hatred against Coptic Christians and blame them for the removal of Morsi and for the violations suffered by his supporters. The use of dangerous sectarian language persists to date, including on the official "Ikhwan On-line" website.'³²

2.3.15 Amnesty International in their report, [Egypt: 'How long are we going to live in this injustice?'](#), published 9 October 2013, reported that Pope Tawadros II stated that 43 churches were completely destroyed on 14 August [2013], with a further 207 Christian properties attacked. The campaign group Maspero Youth Union documented the destruction of 37 churches across the country, with 23 additional churches targeted for attacks and/or partially damaged. Attacks took place in Alexandria, Assiut, Beni Suef, Fayoum, Giza, Greater Cairo, Luxor, Al-Minya, North Sinai, Sohag and Suez. Eyewitnesses told Amnesty International that the violence was also marked by the use of sectarian and inflammatory slogans and chants, frequently preceded by incitement from local mosques and religious leaders.³³

2.3.16 One of the defining characteristics of violence against Copts in Egypt is the arson and destruction of Christian churches. MRGI reported:

'Importantly, this long term pattern of violence against churches has also occurred against a backdrop of institutionalized discrimination against Egypt's Christian community. These include stringent restrictions on the construction and renovation of churches, typically involving a slow and arbitrary process of official review and approval,

³¹ Minority Rights Group International. No change in sight: the situation of religious minorities in post-Mubarak Egypt. 9 December 2013, <http://www.minorityrights.org/download.php?id=1314> Accessed 7 May 2014

³² Amnesty International Roadmap to repression: No end in sight to human rights violations 23 January 2014 Introduction, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/52e22bb14.html> Accessed 5 February 2014

³³ Amnesty International, How long are we going to live in this injustice? 9 October 2013 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE12/058/2013/en> Accessed 5 February 2014

in contrast to the more relaxed and often unenforced regulations on the building of mosques.’³⁴

2.3.17 Christian Solidarity Worldwide reported that on 30 September 2013 the General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Minya survived an attempted assassination when unknown gunmen opened fire on his entourage in the village of Al-Sarw (el Sario) in Abu Qurqas, Minya Province.³⁵ The 2014 USCIRF report notes that ‘In October [2013], four Copts were killed, including two sisters aged eight and 12, when gunmen on motorcycles opened fire at a wedding party outside a church near Cairo. There were a number of other violent attacks on Christians and their property in 2013, particularly in Upper Egypt’.³⁶

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Proselytising

2.3.18 Neither the constitution nor the civil and penal codes prohibit proselytising, and the government generally tolerates foreign religious workers on condition that they do not proselytise Muslims. Non-Muslim minorities and foreign religious workers generally refrain from proselytising to avoid legal penalties, such as for disrupting social cohesion, and extra-legal repercussions from authorities and local Islamists.³⁷

2.3.19 Assyrian International News Agency reported in June 2012 of clashes which broke out between Muslim and Coptic students at the Assiut University after a Coptic student reportedly proselytised Christianity to Muslim students leaving 12 students and supervisors injured.³⁸ The Australian Government Refugee Review Tribunal in a response of 12 July 2011 included reports relating to arrests of Christians involved in proselytising. Police have reportedly harassed and detained individuals accused of proselytising on charges of insulting heavenly religions or inciting sectarian strife.³⁹ In June 2012, Abdel, a Christian convert, was sentenced to nine days in detention for distributing Christian pamphlets.⁴⁰ See also [Prosecutions for blasphemy and defamation of religion](#)

2.3.20 A January 2014 thematic report on Egyptian Copts by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) also noted, however, that the Coptic community, and most Christians, generally do not attempt to proselytise in Egypt. Any attempt to do so

³⁴ Minority Rights Group International. No change in sight: the situation of religious minorities in post-Mubarak Egypt. 9 December 2013, <http://www.minorityrights.org/download.php?id=1314>

³⁵ [Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Egypt: Coptic Bishop survives assassination attempt, 2 October 2013](#) Accessed 11 July 2014

³⁶ [United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2014 - Countries of Particular Concern: Egypt, 30 April 2014](#), Accessed 11 July 2014

³⁷ [US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2012: Egypt, 20 May 2013 Executive summary](#) Accessed 11 July 2014

³⁸ Assyrian International News Agency (AINA), Muslims Attack Christian Students Over Proselytizing in Egypt, 10 June 2012 <http://www.aina.org/news/20120610130132.htm> Accessed 25 February 2014

³⁹ Australia: Refugee Review Tribunal, Egypt: 1. Provide information on attitudes towards proselytising by the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt. 2. Please provide information on the attitude of the Egyptian authorities towards a person who had participated in demonstrations against the government in a Western country. Would such a person be detained, imprisoned or otherwise harmed on return to the country? 3. Deleted. 4. Is there any information on the treatment of failed asylum seekers?, 12 July 2011 <http://www.refworld.org/docid/50f93f352.html> Accessed 25 February 2014

⁴⁰ [Huffington Post, Egypt Elections: Coptic Christian Ex-Patriots Keep A Way Eye On Polls, 19 June 2012](#) Accessed 11 July 2014

would likely be resisted by societal elements—in rural and more conservative areas, perhaps violently.⁴¹

Interfaith relationships

2.3.21 Pew Research's analysis: 'The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society: Chapter 6 Interfaith Relationships', published 30 April 2013, found that no Muslims surveyed in Egypt would be comfortable with an interfaith marriage for their daughter whilst 17% of Muslims in Egypt said they would be very/somewhat comfortable with a son entering an interfaith marriage.⁴²

2.3.22 An article of 3 June 2010 in the Economist noted:

'Egypt's laws governing marriage and divorce are a multi-storeyed affair. For the majority of Egyptians, who are Muslim, they are set by sharia law as interpreted by Imam Abu Hanifa, an eighth-century Iraqi scholar who founded one of Sunni Islam's four jurisprudential schools...Secularists have long argued that Egyptians should be able to marry outside their faiths. Islam, for instance, forbids a Muslim woman from marrying a non-Muslim man. Egypt is still conservative in such matters, so things are unlikely to change soon.'⁴³

2.3.23 The U.S. Department of State reported in its 2012 annual report that 'The government recognizes only the marriages of Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Non-Muslim men must convert to Islam to marry Muslim women, although non-Muslim women need not convert to marry Muslim men. A non-Muslim woman who converts to Islam, however, must divorce if her husband is not Muslim and he is unwilling to convert. Custody of children is then awarded to the mother.'⁴⁴

2.3.24 The USCIRF 2013 reported, 'Under Egyptian law, Muslim men can marry Christian women but Muslim women are prohibited from marrying Christian men. Additionally, neither Coptic men nor Coptic women may marry outside their faith. As a result, marriages between men and women across the two communities are often a source of societal tension between Muslims and Christians in Egypt'.⁴⁵ Minority Rights reported that in January 2012 'homes of Copts in Sharbat village, near Alexandria, were burned following rumours of an alleged relationship between a married Muslim woman and a Christian man'.⁴⁶ In November 2013, Agence France-Presse reported that a Muslim man was killed, six people wounded and two houses owned by Christians in the area set ablaze when violence erupted in Minya province over a relationship between a Coptic Christian and a Muslim woman.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Egyptian Copts, 28 January 2014, Conversion from Islam to Christianity, 3.22. <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/dfat-tir-egypt.pdf> Accessed 8 April 2014

⁴² Pew Research, The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society: Chapter 6 Interfaith Relations, 30 April 2013, <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-interfaith-relations/> Accessed 10 April 2014

⁴³ The Economist, You can't just marry anyone, 3 June 2010. <http://www.economist.com/node/16276799> Accessed 10 June 2014

⁴⁴ US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2012: Egypt, Section II, Status of government respect for religious freedom, 20 May 2013, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dliid=208386> Accessed 5 February 2014

⁴⁵ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report 2013, Egypt, Discrimination against Christians, 30 April 2013 Accessed 11 July 2014

⁴⁶ Minority Rights Group International, State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2013: Middle East and North Africa, Egypt, 24 September 2013 Accessed 11 July 2014

⁴⁷ Agence France-Presse, One dead in Muslim-Christian clash in Egypt: report, 29 November 2013

Women

2.3.25 A thematic report on Egyptian Copts by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) published in January 2014 reports that, 'Coptic women are generally able to work and travel unaccompanied in most areas of Egypt', but notes that 'contacts have told DFAT that Coptic women can face harassment and discrimination because they are identified as Copts (for instance, for not having their hair covered). This is more likely to be the case in rural and poorer areas. However, DFAT notes the relatively high levels of societal discrimination against all women in Egypt (including within the Coptic community).' According to the DFAT report it is 'aware of anecdotal reports of Christian men and women being encouraged – or cajoled – to convert to Islam'⁴⁸

2.3.26 Egyptian political activist Cynthia Farahat, a Coptic Christian and co-founder of the Liberal Egyptian Party, testified before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission in the House of Representatives, USA on 9 December 2011. The following is an extract from her testimony (as reported in the Blaze) describing the situation for Coptic women:

'In 1971, President Sadat introduced shariah law to the constitution and now I think it's [sic], qualifies to say that Egypt is a constitutional theocracy and it's not a modern state. The consequences were that Copts are no longer, according to shariah law, identified or defined as citizen. I have an Egyptian passport, but I'm not a citizen. The concept of citizenship is a Western concept that does not apply to us in Egypt. I'm a woman and I'm a Copt. I'm a fourth-class citizen in Egypt. A first-class citizen in Egypt is the Sunni male, Muslim male. The second-class is the Sunni female. The third-class is the Coptic male. And fourth-class is the Coptic female.'⁴⁹

2.3.27 The USCIRF 2013 reported that during 2012 'there continued to be claims about Muslim men forcing Coptic Christian women to convert to Islam...Egyptian government officials stated that reporting of such cases was inaccurate and that they typically are the result of feuds between families in Upper Egypt. Nevertheless, some human rights groups continue to assert that there were also cases where Coptic Christian women were lured deceptively into marriages with Muslim men and forced to convert to Islam.'⁵⁰

2.3.28 During a hearing at the U.S. Helsinki Commission in July 2012, Professor Michele Clark testified:

'...based on the findings of a recent research report on this matter, the number of disappearances and abductions of Coptic women appear to be increasing even though families of victims do not report all cases. The police do not register all complaints filed by family members. In many cases, family members of missing young women reported that the police would not file a report until a lawyer intervened. In other cases, families do not file reports because they do not believe that their claims will be taken seriously or because they fear retribution by the authorities. Not all families are financially able to

⁴⁸ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, DFAT Thematic Report: Egyptian Copts, paragraph 3.39 and 3.46, 28 January 2014. <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/dfat-tir-egypt.pdf> Accessed 8 April 2014

⁴⁹ The Blaze, Egyptian Coptic Christian and 'Fourth-Class Citizen' Describes Savage Massacre During Congressional Hearing, 9 December 2011. <http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2011/12/09/egyptian-coptic-christian-testifies-before-congress-i-am-a-woman-and-im-a-copt-im-a-fourth-class-citizen/> Accessed 10 June 2014

⁵⁰ [U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report 2013, Egypt, Converts and reconverts to Christianity, 30 April 2013](#)

secure the services of an attorney; while not a guarantee of results, the presence of an attorney would at least enable the filing of a legitimate claim.⁵¹

2.3.29 A Coptic activist claimed there is an active ring called 'Sharia Association of Ain Shams' in the Cairo suburb of ain Shams, which kidnaps Christian minors, and relies on the protection and backing of a particular prosecutor who colludes with the association.⁵² In April 2013, Inter Press Service (IPS) ran an article describing a similar occurrence in Alexandria where a local Salafi leader has a 'history of abducting Coptic Christian girls and forcing them to convert to Islam and marry Muslim men, claim rights activists.'⁵³

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Converts

2.3.30 Islam is the official religion of the state and the principles of Sharia (Islamic law) are the primary sources of legislation.⁵⁴ The government interprets Sharia as forbidding Muslims from converting to another religion despite there being no statutory prohibitions on conversion. This policy, along with the refusal of local officials to recognize such conversions legally, constitutes a prohibition in practice.⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch reports that the Mubarak government used Article 98 (f) of the Penal Code to 'criminalize expressions of unorthodox religious views, including conversion from Islam' and 'at times arrested persons who converted to Christianity, particularly if those persons publicly announced their conversion or appeared to be proselytizing.'⁵⁶ See [2.2 Legal rights](#).

2.3.31 The USCIRF 2013, stated:

'Egyptian-born Muslims who have converted to Christianity cannot reflect their change of religious affiliation on identity documents, and in many cases, these converts also face intense social hostility. In past cases where converts have sued for the right to reflect their new religious affiliation on ID cards, Egyptian courts have ruled that Muslims are forbidden from converting from Islam based on principles of Islamic law because conversion would constitute a disparagement of the official state religion and entice other Muslims to convert.'⁵⁷

2.3.32 A January 2014 thematic report on Egyptian Copts by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) noted:

⁵¹ [U.S. Helsinki Commission, Escalating violence against Coptic women and girls: Will the new Egypt be more dangerous than the old? , "The Disappearance, Forced Conversions and Forced Marriages of Coptic Christian Women and Girls in Egypt", Testimony of Michele Clark, Adjunct Professor, the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University, 18 July 2012 Accessed 11 July 2014](#)

⁵² [Assyrian International News Agency, Egyptian Judiciary Accused of Collusion in Kidnapping and Forced Islamization of Christian Minors, 25 January 2012](#)

⁵³ [Inter Press Service \(IPS\), Missing Christian Girl Leave Trail of Tears, 16 April 2013](#)

⁵⁴ US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2012: Egypt, 20 May 2013, Executive summary, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dliid=208386> Accessed 5 February 2014

⁵⁵ US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2012: Egypt, 20 May 2013, Section II, Status of government respect for religious freedom, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dliid=208386> Accessed 5 February 2014

⁵⁶ [Human Rights Watch, The Road Ahead: A Human Rights Agenda for Egypt's New Parliament, 6. Amend Provisions that Criminalize Freedom of Religion, January 2012](#)

⁵⁷ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report 2013: Egypt, Converts and Reconverts to Christianity, 30 April 2013, <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/Egypt%202013.pdf> Accessed 5 February 2014

'There is no statutory prohibition on conversion from Islam to other religions in Egypt. DFAT assesses that a person who converts to another religion from Islam would not normally be harassed or monitored by Egyptian authorities.

'However, officials—including courts—interpret sharia as forbidding Muslims from converting to another religion and refuse to recognise such conversions legally and converts can encounter practical difficulties. For example, a convert's national identity card (and corresponding record) will not be amended to recognise their new religious affiliation. This has ramifications on personal status issues, such as marriage, divorce, and the state's view of the religious identity of any children. (Egyptian children obtain a national identity card at age 16, with their religious identity generally matching their parents'—or their Muslim parent, in the case of a mixed marriage.) Converts to Islam (or converts from Judaism to Christianity, but not the other way round) will have their conversions recognised, and their identity cards changed accordingly. A 2011 court ruling allowed Christians who converted to Islam and then back to Christianity to amend their identity cards to reflect their chosen faith. However, Coptic community members reported to DFAT that only a small number of such persons have been allowed to do so; according to these contacts, several thousand people are waiting to have their cards changed.

'Christians that have "Muslim" on their identity cards (irrespective of whether they were born to Christian or Muslim families) will generally face difficulty being married in a Christian ceremony. Any children that person has will be considered Muslim by the state (and, at age 16, would usually have "Muslim" written on their identity card).

'Converts might face societal discrimination in the form of rejection from their families or communities. Such discrimination would likely be worse in poorer or rural areas, where more conservative values are held.'⁵⁸

2.3.33 The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada in a response of 27 November 2013, quoting an independent journalist noted that a convert from Islam to Christianity attempting to obtain a passport 'should not have a problem as Egyptian passports do not state the person's religion in the data page'.

The response went on to say:

'...a convert was not legally barred from receiving a card but that "if [the convert] tries to get an identification card he will be given one stating that he is a Moslem". The independent journalist stated that there have been cases in which persons who are attempting to change the religious status on their ID card or obtain passports "have been harassed by Security Services," but added that this was done in an "extralegal manner" (Independent Journalist 10 Nov. 2013). An Associate Professor of political and international studies at Trinity Western University stated that "the difficulty of individuals seeking a religion change on their government-issued identity card is well-documented" and that "[t]his would extend also to having new identity documents issued by the government, including a passport". The Associate Professor considered that the "difficulties would include extensive questioning, arbitrary arrest and detention, harassment, and confiscation of identity documents required for the passport" and that "it

⁵⁸ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Egyptian Copts, 28 January 2014, Conversion from Islam to Christianity 3.19-3.22. <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/dfat-tir-egypt.pdf> Accessed 8 April 2014

would be the exceptional case in which a Muslim convert to Christianity would not have difficulties getting official documents". (Associate Professor 8 Nov. 2013)' ⁵⁹

2.3.34 The same source also noted:

'In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, an independent journalist and publisher, who is also an activist for democracy and has previously served as the chairperson for the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR), an NGO dedicated to monitoring human rights in the country, stated that [c]onverting to Christianity, or better still converting from Islam, is technically not possible. While the laws do not forbid or criminalize it in any way, there is no legal [a]venue for doing so. If an Egyptian Moslem converts to any other religion and tries to register the conversion, he will simply be denied that by any government official. It normally is left at that and no legal charges are made. (Independent Journalist 10 Nov. 2013)

'However, in correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, an associate professor of political and international studies at Trinity Western University who has researched Christian minorities in the Middle East for almost two decades, stated that "a convert to Christianity from Islam will have extreme difficulty dealing with officials and neighbours who have any idea of his or her decision" (Associate Professor 8 Nov. 2013). The Associate Professor added that "Muslim converts to Christianity are regularly harassed by government officials who view their actions as a social offence against Islam tantamount to treason" (Associate Professor 8 Nov. 2013).

'Similarly, in correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, a board member of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Canada stated that authorities will attempt to dissuade someone from converting from Islam to Christianity and may arbitrarily imprison the person alongside "dangerous criminals" if they insist on converting (Coptic Orthodox Church of Canada 13 Nov. 2013).' ⁶⁰

2.3.35 Sky News reported on 17 January 2013 about a family who illegally obtained documents while attempting to convert to Christianity. Although the article suggests that the sentences imposed were for conversion it appears they were officially given for forging documents.

'A mother and her seven children have been jailed for 15 years in Egypt for converting back to Christianity. Nadia Mohamed Ali and her children Mohab, Maged, Sherif, Amira, Amir and Nancy were sentenced at the criminal court in Beni Suef, 70 miles south of Cairo.

'Another seven people involved in the case were also sentenced to five years in prison, according to reports.

'Nadia was born a Christian, but converted to Islam when she married husband Mohamed Abdel-Wahhab Mustafa 23 years ago. He later died, and she planned to convert back to Christianity along with her family.

⁵⁹ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Egypt: Whether people who have converted from Islam to Christianity, particularly those converts who have been arrested, are able to obtain passports and leave the country (April 2010-November 2013), 27 November 2013, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/52ce9aa64.html> Accessed 5 February 2014

⁶⁰ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Egypt: Whether people who have converted from Islam to Christianity, particularly those converts who have been arrested, are able to obtain passports and leave the country (April 2010-November 2013) , 27 November 2013, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/52ce9aa64.html> Accessed 5 February 2014

'In 2004, after converting back to Christianity, they attempted to get new identity cards with their Christian names on them. But one of her children was arrested in 2006 and police became suspicious after looking at his documents and noticing he had changed his name. He confessed the documents had been changed illegally and Nadia, her children and clerks who processed the identity cards were all arrested and charged. The family was sentenced to 15 years in prison in court last week.

'Christians in Egypt who convert to Islam have complained they face difficulties if they decide to convert back, especially in changing names on official documents. This leads many people to forge the documents, risking prison sentences.'⁶¹

2.3.36 Morning Star News reported in June 2014 that Bishoy Armia Boulous, formerly Mohammed Hegazy, was sentenced to five years in prison and a fine of 500 Egyptian pounds (US\$70). The exact section of the nation's criminal code that Boulous allegedly violated was not released, but the judge in Minya Criminal Court stated that he was convicted of 'disturbing the peace by broadcasting false information on The Way TV, an evangelism channel, that disturbed the peace and public security.' According to his lawyer, Wagdy Halfa 'the real reason Boulous was charged and sentenced was because he abandoned Islam and became a Christian.'⁶²

2.3.37 Converts from Islam to Christianity lose all rights of inheritance. Because the government offers no legal means for such converts to amend their civil records to reflect their new religious status, apart from the recent exception for reconverts, a convert's loss of inheritance rights may not be indicated on civil documents. The minor children of Muslim converts to Christianity, and in some cases adult children who were minors when their parents converted, may automatically remain classified as Muslims because the government does not recognize conversion from Islam. This is true irrespective of the religion of the other parent.⁶³

For information on forcible conversions, see [Women](#)

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2.4. State protection

2.4.1 The Egyptian police is a reflection of the Egyptian population; the increasingly conservative nature of Egyptian society is mirrored in the police force. Further, particularly in rural areas, the police live in the community they are policing and are subject to local pressure to make choices that are congruent with dominant social mores. This is at least partially responsible for the poor responses frequently reported in regards to attacks on Christian properties in Upper Egypt.⁶⁴

2.4.2 The US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2012 stated:

⁶¹ Sky News Family Jailed In Egypt For Becoming Christian, 17 January 2013.

<http://news.sky.com/story/1039122/family-jailed-in-egypt-for-becoming-christian> Accessed 21 February 2014

⁶² Morning Star News, Noted Convert in Egypt, Formerly Known as Hegazy, Sentenced to Five Years in Prison, 19 June 2014 Accessed 11 July 2014

⁶³ US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2012: Egypt, 20 May 2013, Section II, Status of government respect for religious freedom, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dclid=208386> Accessed 5 February 2014

⁶⁴ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Country Report: Egypt, 28 January 2014.

<http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/cgn-egypt.pdf> Accessed 8 April 2014

'While recognized and unrecognized religious minorities mostly worshiped without harassment, the government generally failed to prevent, investigate, or prosecute crimes against members of religious minority groups, especially Coptic Christians, which fostered a climate of impunity. In some cases, government authorities reacted slowly or with insufficient resolve while mobs attacked Christians and their property, or encouraged Christians to leave their homes...In many cases the government continued to sponsor or permit informal "reconciliation sessions," which generally precluded criminal prosecution for crimes against Copts and contributed to a climate of impunity...The government failed to condemn or counter incendiary speech.'⁶⁵

2.4.3 The DFAT added:

'Generally speaking, the security forces have treated episodes of sectarian tension or violence as individual security incidents, rather than examples of a societal problem requiring broader efforts. However, security forces will usually work to prevent sectarian tensions getting out of control and will intervene to restore order or promise compensation for damage. In rural areas, traditional justice mechanisms (such as community reconciliation committees) are often encouraged to resolve sectarian tensions, instead of a law enforcement approach.'⁶⁶

2.4.4 The USSD report (covering 2013) noted that throughout the year there were credible reports that security forces failed to prevent or respond to societal violence against Coptic Christians and other religious minorities. The report went on to note:

'On September 16 [2013], security forces regained control over the Minya town of Delga, which had been dominated by local Islamists and "thugs" after local police abandoned their posts on August 14. On September 19, security forces reestablished government control over Kerdasa, a city in the Giza Governorate. Local Islamists and armed "thugs," young men apparently unaffiliated with any political or religious movement, had seized control of the city following an August 14 attack on a police station in which assailants killed 11 police officers and desecrated their bodies. Citizens in Kerdasa and Delga reported that before security forces re-established control, Islamist vigilantes imposed severe, heterodox interpretations of sharia and subjected Copts (including clergy) to verbal threats and physical abuse.'⁶⁷

2.4.5 Similarly, the 2013 USCIRF report notes that 'The ongoing violence, and the inability to prosecute successfully those responsible, continued to foster a climate of impunity, especially in Upper Egypt. In recent years, in response to sectarian violence, Egyptian authorities have conducted "reconciliation" sessions between Muslims and Christians as a way of easing tensions and resolving disputes. In some cases, reconciliation sessions have been abused by local authorities and Muslim and Christian religious leaders to compel victims to abandon their claims to any legal remedy'.⁶⁸

2.4.6 The 2014 USCIRF noted, 'Despite some progress during a turbulent political transition, the Morsi-era government and the interim government failed or were slow to protect

⁶⁵ US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2012: Egypt, 20 May 2013 Section I. Religious Demography,

⁶⁶ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Country Report: Egypt, 28 January 2014. <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/cgn-egypt.pdf> Accessed 8 April 2014

⁶⁷ United States Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2013 - Egypt, 27 February 2014, available at: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dlid=220350> Accessed 10 June 2014

⁶⁸ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2013 - Countries of Particular Concern: Egypt, 30 April 2013

religious minorities, particularly Coptic Orthodox Christians, from violence.’ It further states:

‘Most perpetrators of sectarian attacks have not been convicted, including from large-scale incidents that occurred in 2011 and 2012... Clerical supporters of President Morsi and some other extremists often used incendiary, sectarian rhetoric and incitement without consequence or accountability. For example, in April 2013, police failed to prevent an attack on St. Mark’s Cathedral during a funeral. The funeral was being held for five Copts who were killed, along with a Muslim, after sectarian attacks two days earlier.’ Reporting on violent attacks against Christians the same source notes that it ‘received reports alleging that police have not investigated many cases, sometimes due to fear of retribution against them by violent extremists. The inability to protect Copts and other religious minorities, and successfully prosecute those responsible for violence, continued to foster a climate of impunity.’⁶⁹

2.4.7 The DFAT, in its Egyptian country report, considered reconciliation committees:

‘Reconciliation committees, a form of traditional justice, have typically been used by authorities when tackling sectarian incidents, particularly in rural and poorer areas where vendettas are not uncommon. They are often seen by authorities as preferable to a judicial approach (as the outcome of reconciliation committees will likely prevent revenge attacks). Reconciliation committees are not used solely for inter-religious disputes. In most cases, the Prosecutor-General will accept the outcome of reconciliation committees and close the relevant files. Reconciliation committees will typically involve victims of crimes abandoning their claims to legal remedy, and instead accepting negotiated apologies and compensation being paid by one or both parties, with promises made to not repeat certain activities. DFAT understands that, sometimes, authorities will put pressure on victims to abandon criminal complaints and accept the outcome of reconciliation committees. On rare (and particularly serious) occasions, people are relocated to other parts of the area or country.

‘Reconciliation committees are sometimes imposed on people by the police, who see them as more effective than proper investigations and prosecutions. Perpetrators of crimes committed as part of the tensions in question are rarely prosecuted. Credible contacts have reported to DFAT that, in the cases of Christian–Muslim reconciliation committees, though compensation might be received from state authorities or Muslim parties, it will rarely meet the damage caused during violence. Moreover, in those cases where one party is required to relocate, it is the Christian party that is generally moved. The Christian community is often offered protection from further attacks as a result of the committee.’⁷⁰

2.4.8 The Carnegie endowment paper, ‘Violence against Copts in Egypt’, published 14 November 2013, noted:

‘With respect to the wave of kidnappings and church burnings, the absence of an effective legal framework has become an acute problem. After Mubarak fell, economic decline stirred material predation. After Morsi’s removal, political frustration contributed to hate crimes. Rather than aggressively defending the rule of law, Egyptian officials at the national and local levels have favored informal dispute resolution over court proceedings,

⁶⁹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2014 - Countries of Particular Concern: Egypt, 30 April 2014, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5369e5c214.html> Accessed 12 May 2014

⁷⁰ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Country Report: Egypt, 28 January 2014. <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/cgn-egypt.pdf> Accessed 8 April 2014

a bias that advantages Muslim perpetrators over their Christian victims. As a result, criminals have kidnapped members of affluent Coptic families—not because of religion differences but because of official indifference and perceived monetary opportunity. A similar sense of impunity emboldens mobs committing acts of aggression against Coptic churches.’⁷¹

2.4.9 Minority Rights Group International reported:

‘The rise of sectarian assaults against minorities and the broader spread of civil conflict, including the death and injury of numerous pro-Morsi demonstrators in August following a military crackdown, also illustrate how far Egypt still has to come in achieving a non-violent and inclusive political consensus. The active targeting of Coptic Christians and their churches in revenge attacks, for instance, not only reflects an apparent escalation in hostility towards this religious minority from some sections of the population, but also the continued inability or even indifference of the authorities to protect minority communities and provide adequate justice for victims.’⁷²

2.4.10 The same source noted:

‘An extensive desk review by the author of major incidents against minorities between 1998 and 2013 identified a number of recurring patterns in the state’s official response that have contributed to a climate of impunity. These included:

- A consistent denial of the existence of religious discrimination, along with an unwillingness to address the issue of sectarianism in violent incidents, with officials frequently repositioning them as isolated events or the result of outside interference.
- A failure to enforce rule of law before, during and after attacks, due to lack of political will or capacity, resulting in inadequate prevention, prosecution and punishment of minority-related crimes.
- A preference for reconciliation and appeasement, often including referral to local community and religious leaders to help pacify both victims and perpetrators, with no differentiation between either and little emphasis on due judicial processes.’⁷³

2.4.11 Amnesty International reported in February 2014 that

‘Coptic Christians faced an unprecedented level of violence after the Rabaa al-Adawiya dispersal; sectarian attacks left four dead and 200 Christian properties and 43 churches damaged. The Egyptian authorities said the attacks were “terrorism”, yet failed to ensure adequate, impartial and independent investigations – including into the security forces’ failure to prevent and stop the violence. Despite government promises, victims have not received reparation and damaged churches have yet to be rebuilt.’⁷⁴

2.4.12 According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide:

⁷¹ The Carnegie Endowment, Violence against Copts in Egypt, 14 November 2013.

<http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/11/14/violence-against-copts-in-egypt/gtsf#> Accessed 7 May 2014

⁷² Minority Rights Group International, No change in sight: the situation of religious minorities in post-Mubarak Egypt. 9 December 2013, Postscript: 3 July 2013 and post-Morsi developments –limited signs of improvement

⁷³ Minority Rights Group International, No change in sight: the situation of religious minorities in post-Mubarak Egypt. 9 December 2013, Lack of legal implementation and Egypt’s climate of impunity

⁷⁴ Amnesty International, Written statement* submitted by Amnesty International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status to the Human Rights Council, 27 February 2014

'In the 2014 constitution, provisions for freedom of religion or belief are maintained with minor improvements. However, the lack of religious freedom in Egypt in the past has been caused not by a lack of constitutional provision, but rather by i) a lack of implementation, ii) an absence of the political will needed to combat longstanding systemic and social violations of religious freedom and iii) official indifference at best and complicity at worst in discrimination and even violence, which in turn feeds into and even validates societal hostility. As such, provisions for absolute freedom of belief (Article 64), equality and non-discrimination (Articles 9, 11, 14, 51 and 53), ring hollow unless accompanied by explicit commitments to implement these provisions, and to combat discriminatory social and structural barriers.'⁷⁵

2.4.13 In May 2014 former army chief, Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, was elected president of Egypt with a reported 97% of the vote.⁷⁶ Many Egyptians see in him the strong leader needed to overcome the instability that has beset Egypt since the mass protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square ended Hosni Mubarak's long rule in 2011. But his ascendancy has left some worrying that it heralds a return to the authoritarian security state that prevailed under Mr Mubarak.⁷⁷

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2.5. New constitution

2.5.1 While the January 2014 constitution has opened up the possibility of improvement for Copts, including a strengthening of religious freedom and greater control over the construction of their churches, it remains to be seen whether there will be a substantive legal and policy shift towards addressing the ongoing institutional discrimination Copts have faced in public office, education, political participation and other areas of civic life. Despite the dramatic shifts in power since the January 25 revolution, the underlying marginalization of the Coptic community has remained largely intact. According to officials, the turnout was a respectable 38.6% – higher than the 33% who voted in a referendum during Morsi's tenure, but lower than the 41.9% who turned out in a similar poll following Egypt's 2011 uprising. In Upper (or southern) Egypt, turnout was noticeably down from 2012, whereas the opposite largely held true in the north. Southern Egypt has traditionally been a stronghold for Islamist groups, who almost all boycotted the poll in protest at Morsi's overthrow and at a crackdown on Islamist dissent – although it is unclear to what extent the poll's middling turnout was the result of a boycott, or just apathy.⁷⁸

2.1.4 Over 98% of participants in the first Egyptian vote of the post-Morsi era voted in favour of approving a new constitution, the country's electoral commission officially announced on Saturday 18 January 2014.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ [Christian Solidarity Worldwide, EGYPT: Constitution 2014 – Religious freedom analysis, February 2014, 3.6 Implementation](#)

⁷⁶ Newsweek, [Abdel Fattah al-Sisi Sworn in as Egypt's New President, 8 June 2014](#)
<http://www.newsweek.com/abdel-fattah-al-sisi-sworn-egypts-new-president-253912>

⁷⁷ BBC News – [Egypt Abdul Fattah al-Sisi profile, 16 May 2014](#) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19256730> Accessed 24 June 2014

⁷⁸ Minority Rights Group International. [No change in sight: the situation of religious minorities in post-Mubarak Egypt. 9 December 2013,](#) <http://www.minorityrights.org/download.php?id=1314>
Accessed 5 February 2014

⁷⁹ The Guardian, [Egypt's new constitution gets 98% 'yes' vote, 18 January 2014.](#)
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/18/egypt-constitution-yes-vote-mohamed-morsi> Accessed 21 February 2014

2.1.5 Reuters reported on 6 January 2014 that ahead of the January Christmas celebrations the security forces in Egypt deployed teams to protect Coptic Christians at their places of worship. 'Plainclothes officers and counter-terrorism specialists will be on the streets near churches, along with "combat units" on roving patrols. Bigger teams will be deployed to the country's largest churches.' It was also reported that interim head of state, Adly Mansour, visited the pope (Tawadros II⁸⁰) in a gesture of symbolic importance that could help bolster Christian support for the army-backed roadmap ahead of a January 14-15 referendum on a new constitution. The visit 'reflected the state's appreciation for the great patriotic role they (Egypt's Copts) played in countering attempts to sow seeds of division among Egyptians', the presidency said in a statement.⁸¹

2.1.6 News reports on 14 January 2014 showed pope Tawadros voting in the country's constitutional referendum in Cairo. Reports also showed Christians in south of Egypt voting freely, 'I cast my ballot as I pleased. I am not afraid of anybody,' said Heba Girgis, a Christian resident in Egypt's southern heartland, who said she was harassed and prevented from casting a vote against the 2012 Islamist-backed constitution. 'Last time I wanted to say no. I waited in line for two hours before the judge closed the station. This time we said yes and our opinion matters,' Girgis added as she walked home with a friend after casting her vote. 'This is for our children, for all those who died and suffered. Our word now carries weight.'⁸²

2.5.2 A spokesman for the Maspero Youth Union, a coalition of Coptic activists, talking to the Washington Post on 6 March 2014, stated: 'Since Morsi, many Copts wanted to be involved. A lot of Copts feared what the Muslim Brotherhood would do.' The newspaper also spoke to the church's bishop for youth, Bishop Moussa, who said it was essential to the future of Copts in Egypt that Christians are an integral part of the fabric of society. 'We are trying to get them outside the church in that civil area to interact with their brothers the Muslims,' he said. 'The church must not interfere in political affairs. We are a religious body.'⁸³

2.5.3 The 2014 U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom report noted:

'There are some encouraging changes in the new constitution that could bode well for religious freedom. Several problematic provisions from the 2012 constitution were removed: a provision that narrowly defined Islamic Shari'ah law; a provision potentially giving Al Azhar a consultative role in reviewing legislation; and a provision that effectively banned blasphemy. In addition, a new provision, Article 235, requires the incoming parliament to pass a law governing the building and renovating of churches. This would potentially lift the longstanding requirement of governmental approval for building or repairing churches, which has served as a justification for sectarian-related violence targeting Christians. While Article 64 provides that "freedom of belief is absolute," like the

⁸⁰ Ahramonline, Bishop Tawadros chosen as Egypt's 118th Coptic Pope, 4 November 2012
<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/57107/Egypt/Politics-/Bishop-Tawadros-chosen-as-Egypt's-118th-Coptic-Pope.aspx> Accessed 21 February 2014

⁸¹ Reuters, Egypt police boost security at churches ahead of Coptic Christmas, 6 January 2014.
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/06/us-egypt-copts-idUSBREA050HA20140106> Accessed 5 February 2014

⁸² Global News, Egypt's Christian minority find new confidence, rally votes for constitution, 14 January 2014.
<http://globalnews.ca/news/1085577/egypts-christian-minority-find-new-confidence-rally-votes-for-constitution/> Accessed 26 February 2014

⁸³ Washington Post, Egypt's young Coptic Christians energized to fight for civil rights, 5 March 2014,
http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/egypts-young-coptic-christians-energized-to-fight-for-civil-rights/2014/03/05/cd2a88d8-a4a4-11e3-b865-38b254d92063_story.html Accessed 10 March 2014

2012 constitution, this article limits the freedom to practice religious rituals and establish places of worship to only the "divine" religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.⁸⁴

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2.6. Freedom of movement

2.6.1 A January 2014 thematic report on Egyptian Copts by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) noted:

‘There is no legal impediment to internal movement within Egypt, including for single women, and Copts do relocate for a variety of reasons. Some Egyptian Copts have internally relocated because of sectarian tension. DFAT understands that some instances have been as a result of reconciliation committees, whereas others have been of a voluntary nature. DFAT understands that, if means allow, families will usually help with finding shelter and financial assistance. The church can also sometimes assist.

‘There is also a large movement of Copts and other Egyptians to live in cities for economic reasons. A senior figure from the Coptic Church told DFAT that some Copts from the poorer parts of Upper Egypt were moving to the north coast of the country for better opportunities. Cities, such as Cairo and Alexandria, offer Copts greater opportunities for employment.

‘Urban middle class Coptic women will likely have a greater ability to find work and shelter, and will also likely have access to a greater number of people that could support them than Coptic women from poor and more conservative areas.’⁸⁵

2.6.2 The USSD 2013 report stated that the ‘law provides for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, albeit with some notable exceptions, including the handling of refugees and asylum seekers. The Civil Aviation Authority, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior, maintained a “no-fly” list that prevented defendants in some court cases from exiting the country. MB members and other individuals wanted by the interim government appeared on the list after July 3 [2013].’⁸⁶

2.6.3 Amnesty International reported in April 2011 that former administrative detainees had their ‘freedom of movement restricted and warned against any public speaking or preaching in mosques; among other things, many were denied passports or were forced to seek permission from the SSI [State Security Investigations service] officer responsible for their case before they could travel inside or outside of Egypt’.⁸⁷

2.6.4 A poll conducted by the Thomson Reuters Foundation in November 2013 amongst 22 Arab states found that ‘Sexual harassment, high rates of female genital cutting and a surge in violence and Islamist feeling after the Arab Spring uprisings have made Egypt

⁸⁴ [United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2014 - Countries of Particular Concern: Egypt, 30 April 2014](#)

⁸⁵ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, DFAT Thematic Report: Egyptian Copts, paragraphs 5.10, 5.11 and 5.12, 28 January 2014. <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/dfat-tir-egypt.pdf> Accessed 8 April 2014

⁸⁶ United States Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2013 - Egypt, Section 2.d, 27 February 2014, available at: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2013&dliid=220350> Accessed 10 June 2014

⁸⁷ [Amnesty International, Time for Justice: Egypt’s corrosive system of detention, April 2011, 2. Administrative detention system, Denial of rights after release](#)

the worst country in the Arab world to be a woman...Discriminatory laws and a spike in trafficking also contributed to Egypt's place at the bottom of a ranking of 22 Arab states".⁸⁸ IPS news reported that sexual harassment is a daily occurrence on the streets of Cairo and a 'trend of mob rapes has risen rapidly in Egypt as political stability and social security have diminished post-revolution.'⁸⁹ According to a UN Women survey conducted in April 2013 '99.3 percent of Egyptian women respondents said they had been sexually harassed'.⁹⁰ Similarly, Women News Network reported in October 2013 that 'Egypt's capital city of Cairo continues to be a dangerous city for the women who live there. Acts of verbal degradation, intimidation and severe sexual harassment continue in the region as political violence and ideological difference has been part of the backdrop. In spite of heightened public awareness sexual harassment and extreme forms of harassment against women continues.'⁹¹

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⁸⁸ [Thomson Reuters Foundation, POLL-Egypt is worst Arab state for women, Comoros best, 12 November 2013](#)

⁸⁹ [IPS news, Cairo Women Bring Men Back on the Rails, 14 November 2013](#)

⁹⁰ [IPS news, Cairo Women Bring Men Back on the Rails, 14 November 2013](#)

⁹¹ [Women News Network, Female police ride Cairo metro as sexual harassment continues, 3 October 2013](#)

Annex A: Maps of Egypt

Map of population density and religious distribution

Michael Mehrdad Izady's [recognised international cartographer, author and academic⁹²] 2011 map⁹³ shows the density of population and religious distribution within Egypt:



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⁹² Kurdistanica, Michael Mehrdad Izady, 7 March 2008, <http://www.kurdistanica.com/?q=node/19> Accessed 23 June 2014

⁹³ GeoCurrents, Egypt's Religious Diversity and Its Forgotten Shi'ites, 14 February 2011 <http://www.geocurrents.info/cultural-geography/egypts-religious-diversity-and-its-forgotten-shiites> Accessed 26 February 2014

Map of Egypt



UN Map of Egypt, March 2012⁹⁴

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⁹⁴ UN Map of Egypt, March 2012. <http://www.un.org/depts/Cartographic/map/profile/egypt.pdf>
 Accessed 23 June 2014

Annex B: Caselaw

MS (Coptic Christians) Egypt CG [2013] UKUT 611 (IAC) (3 December 2013)

This case, relating to Coptic Christians, concluded:

1. Notwithstanding that there is inadequate state protection of Coptic Christians in Egypt, they are not at a general risk of persecution or ill-treatment contrary to Article 3, ECHR.
2. However, on current evidence there are some areas where Coptic Christians will face a real risk of persecution or ill-treatment contrary to Article 3. In general these will be (a) areas outside the large cities; (b) where radical Islamists have a strong foothold; and (c) there have been recent attacks on Coptic Christians or their churches, businesses or properties.
3. On the evidence before the Upper Tribunal, the following are particular risk categories in the sense that those falling within them will generally be able to show a real risk of persecution or treatment contrary to Article 3, at least in their home area:
 - (i) converts to Coptic Christianity;
 - (ii) persons who are involved in construction or reconstruction/repair of churches that have been the target for an attack or attacks;
 - (iii) those accused of proselytising where the accusation is serious and not casual;
 - (iv) those accused of being physically or emotionally involved with a Muslim woman, where the accusation is made seriously and not casually.
4. Coptic Christian women in Egypt are not in general at real risk of persecution or ill-treatment, although they face difficulties additional to other women, in the form of sometimes being the target of disappearances, forced abduction and forced conversion.
5. However, depending on the particular circumstances of the case, Coptic Christian women in Egypt aged between 14-25 years who lack a male protector, may be at such risk.
6. If a claimant is able to establish that in their home area they fall within one or more of the risk categories identified in 3 (i)-(iv) above or that they come from an area where the local Coptic population faces a real risk of persecution, it will not necessarily follow that they qualify as refugees or as beneficiaries of subsidiary protection or Article 3 ECHR protection. That will depend on whether they can show they would not have a viable internal relocation alternative. In such cases there will be need for a fact-specific assessment but, in general terms, resettlement in an area where Islamists are not strong would appear to be a viable option.
7. None of the above necessarily precludes a Coptic Christian in Egypt from being able to establish a real risk of persecution or ill-treatment in the particular circumstances of their case, e.g. if such an individual has been the target of attacks because he or she is a Coptic Christian.

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