

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION KEY DOCUMENTS

EGYPT

9 AUGUST 2008

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1. Preface

This Country of Origin Information Key Documents (COI Key Documents) on Egypt has been produced by COI Service, UK Border Agency, for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. It provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The COI Key Documents includes information available up to 9 August 2008. This document was issued on 27 August 2008.

- The COI Key Documents is an indexed list of key reports, papers and articles produced by a wide range of recognised external information sources. It does not contain any UK Border Agency opinion or policy.
- For UK Border Agency users, the COI Key Documents provides direct electronic access to each source referred to in the document, via a link on the source numbers in the index and list of sources. For the benefit of external users, the relevant web link has also been included, together with the date that the link was accessed.
- iv As noted above, the documents identified concentrate mainly on human rights issues. By way of introduction, brief background information on Libya is also provided. Please note, this background material is not intended to provide a summary of the material contained in the documents listed.
- v This COI Key Documents and the documents listed are publicly disclosable.
- vi Any comments regarding this COI Key Documents or suggestions for additional source material are very welcome and should be submitted to COI Service as below.

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Website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html

ADVISORY PANEL ON COUNTRY INFORMATION

vii The independent Advisory Panel on Country Information (APCI) was established in 2003 to make recommendations to the Home Secretary about the content of the UK Border Agency's country of origin information material. The APCI welcomes all feedback on the UK Border Agency's Key Documents, COI Reports and other country of origin information material. Information about the Panel's work can be found on its website at www.apci.org.uk

- viii In the course of its work, the APCI reviews the content of selected UK Border Agency COI documents and makes recommendations specific to those documents and of a more general nature. The APCI may or may not have reviewed this particular document. At the following link is a list of the COI Key Documents, COI Reports and other documents which have, to date, been reviewed by the APCI: www.apci.org.uk/reviewed-documents.html
- Please note: It is not the function of the APCI to endorse any UK Border Agency material or procedures. Some of the material examined by the Panel relates to countries designated or proposed for designation for the Non-Suspensive Appeals (NSA) list. In such cases, the Panel's work should not be taken to imply any endorsement of the decision or proposal to designate a particular country for NSA, nor of the NSA process itself.

Advisory Panel on Country Information:

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Website: www.apci.org.uk

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2. Background information on Egypt

Full Country Name: The Arab Republic of Egypt

Area: 1,001,450 sq. km

Population: 76.5 million (Census 2006) **Capital City:** Cairo (population - 17 million)

People: Eastern Hamitic (Egyptians, Bedouins, and Berbers) (99%); Greek, Nubian,

Armenian, other European (primarily Italian and French) (1%)

Languages: Arabic (official), English and French widely understood

Religion(s): Muslim (mostly Sunni) (90%), Coptic Christian (9%) and other (1%)

Currency: 1 Egyptian Pound (LE) = 100 Piastres (PT)

Major political parties: National Democratic Party (ruling party), Wafd Party,

Tagammu and Party **Government:** Republic

Head of State: President Mohammed Hosni MUBARAK (since October 1981)

Prime Minister/Premier: Dr Ahmed Nazif (since July 2004) **Foreign Minister:** Mr Ahmed Aboul Gheit (since July 2004)

(Information extracted from the FCO Country Profile, 22 August 2007) [2b]

GEOGRAPHY

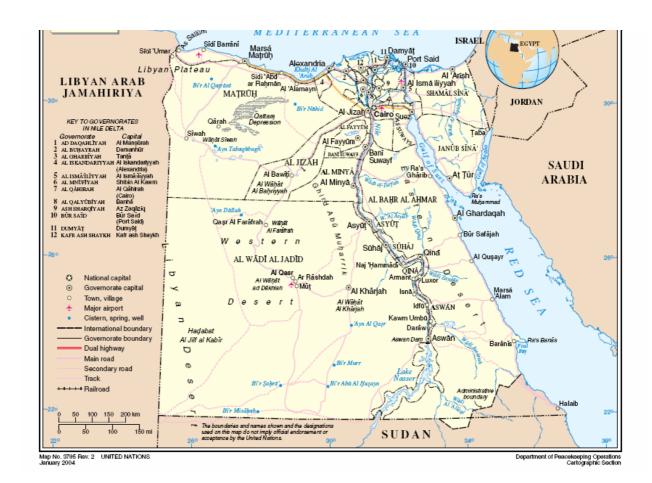
"Egypt lies in the north-eastern corner of Africa, a major crossroads between Europe, the Middle East, Africa and west and south Asia, with an area of 386,000 square miles (four times the size of the UK). It is bordered by Libya to the west, Sudan to the south, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Israel and Jordan to the north-east. Its north coast is on the Mediterranean Sea, while the Red Sea bounds the eastern coast. The Suez Canal links the Red Sea to the Mediterranean - a linkage vital to both Egypt and the world. Less than 4% of the country is cultivated and inhabited, mainly in the Nile Delta and along the banks of the Nile.

The Nile runs for over 1,000 miles within Egypt, from Wadi Halfa in the south to the Mediterranean in the north. It divides the country into four broad regions; the Western Desert, which occupies almost two-thirds of the total area, the Eastern Desert, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Nile Valley and Delta, which is the most densely populated region of the country. Egypt is dependent on the Nile for nearly all its water needs. The vast majority of the remaining land is made up of sparsely inhabited, arid desert.

Egypt is hot and dry in the summer, mild in the winter with rainfall increasing nearer the coastlines. Temperatures increase southwards, and on average, these vary between 22-37 degrees Centigrade in the summer and 9-19 degrees Centigrade in the winter". (FCO Country Profile, 22 August 2007) [2b]

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MAP OF EGYPT



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RECENT HISTORY

"An Anglo-Egyptian treaty of alliance was signed in 1936. It recognised Egypt's full independence and introduced a phased withdrawal of British forces. Despite this, and the installation of an Egyptian royal family descending from the sultans, the British military presence and influence remained, the final British troops leaving the Suez Canal zone in 1956. Nationalism and defeat in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war discredited the monarchy, and on 23 July 1952 the Free Officers seized power in a coup d'etat. The King abdicated. The following year, General Muhammad Neguib was proclaimed President of the new republic." (FCO Country Profile, 9 February 2007) [2a]

"In 1954, Neguib was replaced as president by Gamal Abd Al-Nasser. A popular vote affirmed this in 1956. Under his presidency, Egypt recognised Sudanese independence; Israel, Britain and France launched a tripartite attack (the Suez War); Egypt and Syria enjoyed a short-lived union, the United Arab Republic (1958-61); and following the June 1967 War, the Sinai Peninsula was occupied by Israel. Yet Nasser was the object of popular adulation across the entire Arab world, and his death in 1970 sent shockwaves far beyond Egypt's borders." (FCO Country Profile, 9 February 2007) [2a]

"Nasser's successor, Anwar Al-Sadat presided over the expulsion of Soviet military advisers (1972); the October 1973 War, which represented a partial triumph for Egypt; improved relations with the USA; economic infitah (opening up); and peace with Israel following US-brokered talks at Camp David. The latter prompted Egypt's expulsion from the Arab League and complicated Sadat's already ambivalent relations with domestic opponents: on 6 October 1981, militant Islamists assassinated him at a military parade." (FCO Country Profile, 9 February 2007) [2a]

"Following the assassination of Sadat, Vice-President Hosni Mubarak was appointed president, a post he occupies to this day. Mubarak oversaw the return of Egypt to the Arab League in 1991, following over a decade of isolation. During this time, Egypt had joined the international coalition, which drove Iraqi occupation forces out of Kuwait, and since then, Mubarak's Egypt has played a pivotal role in the Middle East Peace Process." (FCO Country Profile, 9 February 2007) [2a]

RECENT EVENTS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

President Hosni Mubarak "... gained a fifth consecutive term in presidential elections in September 2005. The poll was the the [sic] first under a new system which allows multiple candidates to stand. In previous elections Egyptians voted yes or no for a single candidate appointed by parliament. However, the only opposition organisation which has broad public support, the Muslim Brotherhood, is banned from open political activity and could not field a candidate." (BBC Country Profile, 18 April 2008) [28a] In November 2006, "President Mubarak promises democratic and constitutional reform in an address to parliament. Opponents are sceptical." (BBC Timeline, 31 May 2008) [28b] The same month sees an "Upsurge in arrests of Muslim Brotherhood members." (BBC Timeline, 31 May 2008) [28b] In March 2007, Egypt held a "Referendum on constitutional amendments. The authorities say 76% of voters approve changes, opposition groups say the poll was rigged." (BBC Timeline, 31 May 2008) [28b] In April 2007 "30 members of the Muslim Brotherhood go on trial, the first time in seven years that members of the group have been tried under military jurisdiction". (BBC Timeline, 31 May 2008) [286] In June 2007 "Parliamentary elections. Governing National Democratic Party wins most votes. (BBC Timeline, 31 May 2008) [286] In April 2008 "Independent unions fail to gather much support for nationwide strike against rising prices and low wages. Heavy police presence prevents factory lock-ins". In the same month "Military courts sentence 25 leading Muslim Brotherhood members to jail terms

in crackdown targeting the organisation's funding. More than 800 arrested over a month. Brotherhood boycotted municipal elections after only 20 candidates allowed to stand". (BBC Timeline, 31 May 2008) [28b]

ECONOMY

"The success of Egypt's ambitious programme of economic reform and liberalisation, to include significant investment in communications and infrastructure, is demonstrated by a current growth rate approaching 7%. The government's five-year plan for the period 2007/8 to 2011/12 includes an ambitious target for annual real GDP growth of 8%. This will meet the need to continue rapid economic growth and allow the gradual reduction of the debt burden. Inflation is expected to average 8.8% this year. Living standards remain low and Government subsidies add to a growing deficit of 10% of GDP.

"Financial sector reform is a government priority and privatisation is an important element in this. Measures taken so far have included major cuts in income tax rates and customs duties and an ambitious programme place to consolidate the banking sector and to improve access to finance for the private sector.

"In trade, Egypt is heavily import-dependent. Exports include oil, cotton and textiles. Service industries, specifically tourism, canal revenues and emigrant workers' remittances, provide a significant proportion of foreign currency earnings". (FCO Country Profile, 22 August 2007) [2b]

Sources: World Bank, IMF (IFS, DOTS)

GDP: \$82bn (2003)

GDP per head: \$1220 (2003)

Annual growth: 7% Inflation: 8.8%

Major Industries: Agriculture, Manufacturing, Services

(Information extracted from the FCO Country Profile, 22 August 2007) [2b]

Exchange Rate: British £1 = 10.59 Egyptian Pound, US \$1 = 5.39 Egyptian Pound, as

of 4 June 2008. (Oanda.com FXConverter, 4 June 2008) [29a-29b]

HUMAN RIGHTS

"Egypt is a signatory to all the major UN human rights conventions. In January 2004, we welcomed the establishment of a National Council for Human Rights chaired by the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Dr Boutros Boutros Ghali, as a demonstration of Egypt's willingness to improve their human rights record. Nevertheless there is still much work to be done, much of which has been set out in the National Council's reports. Freedom of expression and freedom of the media are two examples of areas in which the Egyptian Government has made progress. But we shall continue to encourage the Egyptian authorities to work towards improving their human rights record.

"One of the key human rights concerns in Egypt is the widespread mistreatment of detainees and use of torture in police stations, especially in cases involving political detainees. The government has taken some steps to address the problem, such as allowing semi-independent prison inspections, improving prison conditions, and paying compensation to victims of torture. There have also been a few court cases against police and prison officers accused of mistreating detainees. But the basic problem still remains, and we actively encourage the Egyptians to tackle it.

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"The Egyptian Government is sometimes accused of persecuting Coptic Christians and other religious minorities, such as Bahá'ís, and restricting freedom of religion. The President is personally involved in efforts to promote tolerance and inter-faith harmony, and has taken some concrete steps to promote and protect Christian rights, such as appointing Christians to parliament and other senior government posts (including the head of the National Council for Human Rights) and declaring 7 January – Coptic Christmas – a national holiday. But sectarian tension and discrimination does sometimes exist at grass roots level, and non-Muslims remain under-represented in certain sectors of society e.g. the armed forces. Other issues of concern include difficulties in obtaining permits for building churches, difficulties faced by religious minorities including converts from Islam to Christianity when obtaining official documents, and the requirement to stipulate one of the three Abrahamic religions on ID cards." (FCO Country Profile, 22 August 2007) [2b]

"Despite constitutional reforms that allowed for multiparty presidential elections in 2005, the Egyptian government in 2006 backtracked on its promises of greater political openness. President Hosni Mubarak postponed municipal elections, fearing a large showing by the Muslim Brotherhood, and extended the 25-year-old Emergency Law despite earlier pledges that it would be replaced with specific antiterrorism legislation. Security services ruthlessly suppressed dissent by political activists who protested the government's reversals. Extremely limited reforms related to judicial independence and press freedom were enacted for the sole purpose of deflecting criticism and consolidating state control. (FH Freedom in the World 2007) [13a]

"Constitutional amendments rushed through parliament were the most serious setback for human rights since the state of emergency was reintroduced in 1981. The amendments cemented the sweeping powers of the police and entrenched in permanent law emergency powers that have been used systematically to violate human rights, including prolonged detention without charge, torture and other ill-treatment, restrictions on freedom of speech, association and assembly, and grossly unfair trials before military courts and special emergency courts. Around 18,000 administrative detainees – people held by order of the Interior Ministry – remained in prison in degrading and inhumane conditions. Some had been held for more than a decade, including many whose release had been repeatedly ordered by courts. Egyptian nationals suspected of terrorism, who had been unlawfully transferred to Egypt by other governments, remained in prison. Courts continued to pass death sentences and at least one person was executed.

"As the biggest strike wave for decades spread across the country involving public and private sector workers, the authorities closed an independent group defending workers' rights. The strikes, sparked by rising living costs, growing poverty and other grievances, coincided with political protests by the Muslim Brotherhood, the largest opposition force, and secular opposition groups campaigning for democratic reforms. Political activists, journalists and bloggers were jailed for peacefully expressing their views". (Al Annual Report 2008) [11a]

"Egypt stepped up attacks on political dissent in 2007. In March the government enshrined aspects of emergency rule via amendments to the constitution, providing a continued basis for arbitrary detention and trials of civilians before military and state security courts. The government arrested thousands of Muslim Brotherhood members and tried senior members in military courts. It brought charges against journalists and bloggers who criticized human rights abuses, and closed human rights and labour rights organizations". (HRW World Report 2008) [12]

"Human rights organizations received credible reports that security services and police tortured and mistreated detainees, particularly during interrogations. On

November 7, 2007, Judge Samir Abu al-Mati sentenced two police officers to three years in prison on charges that they tortured `Imad al-Kabir, a microbus driver detained in January 2006 on charges of resisting arrest. Al-Kabir said that the officers beat him on the street and then, in a police station, bound and whipped him, and sexually assaulted him with a stick while another officer filmed the episode with a mobile phone. On January 9, 2007, Judge al-Mati sentenced Al-Kabir to three months in prison for "resisting authorities" and assaulting a civil servant". (HRW World Report 2008) [12]

"In April 2007 security officers closed the headquarters and two branches of the Center for Trade Union and Workers' Services (CTUWS), which offers legal aid to Egyptian factory workers and reports on labor-rights issues. Authorities blamed the CTUWS for inciting labor unrest around the country. On October 12, a court sentenced the group's general coordinator, Kamal Abbas, and his lawyer, Muhammad Hilmi, to a year in prison on criminal libel charges after the CTUWS magazine published a story about alleged corruption at a youth center whose board is chaired by a member of the ruling party". (HRW World Report 2008) [12]

"The government detained more than 1,000 members of the Muslim Brotherhood, the banned organization that is the country's largest opposition group. On June 3, 2007, authorities prevented Egyptian and international human rights organizations from attending the military trial of 40 leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood. In January, a Cairo criminal court had dismissed all charges against 16 of the defendants and ordered their immediate release. Security forces rearrested the men moments after their release, and President Hosni Mubarak ordered their cases, and those of 24 others, transferred to the military court. At this writing, the accused are in custody pending the conclusion of their trial". (HRW World Report 2008) [12]

"The government's respect for human rights remained poor, and serious abuses continued in many areas. The government limited citizens' right to change their government and continued a state of emergency, in place almost continuously since 1967. Security forces tortured and abused prisoners and detainees, in many cases with impunity. Prison and detention center conditions were poor. Security forces arbitrarily arrested and detained individuals and kept them in prolonged pretrial detention. The executive branch placed limits on and pressured the judiciary. Security forces held political prisoners and detainees. The government's respect for freedoms of press, association, and religion declined during the year, and the government continued to restrict other civil liberties, particularly freedom of speech, including Internet freedom, and freedom of assembly, including restrictions on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Corruption and lack of transparency persisted. Discrimination and violence against women, including female genital mutilation (FGM), continued. During the year the government and civil society took steps to combat FGM, including a Ministry of Health decree banning the practice." (USSD Report on Human Rights Practices 2007) [6b]

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3. Index to key source documents

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	[11a]	Amnesty International (AI) Annual Report 2008, Undated http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/regions/middle-east-and-north-africa/egypt
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