



**1. Please provide information on lesbian clubs/venues in Alexandria, and any information on resources/facilities for lesbians including websites in Alexandria and Egypt.**

Source note: Information on lesbians in Egypt is extremely limited. All sources refer to the fact that, while lesbian groups/communities undoubtedly exist in Egypt, they are underground and virtually invisible. The three major sources are used in this response. DIMIA Issues Brief: *Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt* (September 2005)<sup>1</sup> and DIAC Issues Brief: *Sexual Minorities – Egypt: An Update and Addendum to the 2005 Paper ‘Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt’* (July 2009)<sup>2</sup> provide a comprehensive overview of the situation of homosexuals in Egypt, although with little information on lesbians. A 2009 bachelor thesis, *Narratives of Lesbian Existence in Egypt – Coming to Terms with Identities*, by Christina Lindström of Stockholm University<sup>3</sup>, was the only study of lesbians in Egypt found in a search of the available sources.

According to the available information, there are no lesbian clubs/venues or open meeting places in Egypt. Christina Lindström, who researched lesbian identity in Egypt for her 2009 Bachelor thesis, reports that her impression is that there is no real existing lesbian subculture in the country.<sup>4</sup> Small closed groups of friends may meet regularly in private, but are careful of who they invite to such meetings. The five women interviewed for her thesis are part of one such group. The only named lesbian group found in the sources consulted is called *Hamd*, which has reportedly been meeting in Cairo since 1963.<sup>5</sup> The group remains underground, only letting in women that a group member can give guarantees for. Lindström was unable to establish if the gatherings were ongoing.<sup>6</sup> According to the women interviewed for Lindström’s thesis, the most common meeting place is online (such as through Facebook, weblogs, or other social networking sites), although they emphasise that resulting face-to-face meetings are seen as risky and often

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<sup>1</sup> DIMIA Country Information Service 2005, *Issues Brief: Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt*, September – Attachment 1.

<sup>2</sup> DIAC Country Information Service 2009, *Issues Brief: Sexual Minorities – Egypt: An Update and Addendum to the 2005 Paper ‘Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt’*, July – Attachment 2.

<sup>3</sup> Lindström, C. 2009, *Narratives of Lesbian Existence in Egypt – Coming to Terms with Identities*, Bachelor thesis, Stockholm University

<http://mena.orient.su.se/upps/Narratives%20of%20Lesbian%20Existence%20in%20Egypt%20-%20Coming%20to%20Terms%20with%20Identities.pdf> - Accessed 6 May 2010 - Attachment 3.

<sup>4</sup> Lindström, C. 2009, *Narratives of Lesbian Existence in Egypt – Coming to Terms with Identities*, Bachelor thesis, Stockholm University, p. 6

<http://mena.orient.su.se/upps/Narratives%20of%20Lesbian%20Existence%20in%20Egypt%20-%20Coming%20to%20Terms%20with%20Identities.pdf> - Accessed 6 May 2010 - Attachment 3.

<sup>5</sup> Jama, A. 2003, “A few good women”, *Huriyah Magazine*, September - Attachment 4.

<sup>6</sup> Lindström, C. 2009, *Narratives of Lesbian Existence in Egypt – Coming to Terms with Identities*, Bachelor thesis, Stockholm University, p. 6

<http://mena.orient.su.se/upps/Narratives%20of%20Lesbian%20Existence%20in%20Egypt%20-%20Coming%20to%20Terms%20with%20Identities.pdf> - Accessed 6 May 2010 - Attachment 3.

take some months to eventuate.<sup>7</sup> This is due to the fear of police surveillance and internet entrapment (although the only examples of this occurring were for gay men<sup>8</sup>). Lindström refers to only one Egyptian lesbian website – <http://emraamethlya.blogspot.com/> – which is the weblog of an Egyptian lesbian whose real name is not disclosed.<sup>9</sup> The weblog is in Arabic. Other specific sites for lesbians in Egypt were not found in a search of the available information.

The 2009 updated DIAC issues brief acknowledges the limited information available on lesbians. The report cites a 2002 *Reuters* article which states that:

Lesbians are virtually invisible in Egypt. Activists said the concept of two women having sexual relations was incomprehensible to most Egyptians, adding they were not in contact with any lesbian groups.<sup>10</sup>

According to a 2005 weblog entry: “[The] online Egyptian gay community is a relatively vibrant one. In most of the big gay dating and befriending websites there are Egyptians. Gaydar ([www.GaydarGuys.com](http://www.GaydarGuys.com) and [www.GaydarGirls.com](http://www.GaydarGirls.com)) currently has many Egyptian members”.<sup>11</sup>

Most websites found, such as Gay Egypt (<http://www.gayegypt.com/>), appear to cater almost exclusively for gay men. The Egypt chapter of the Gay and Lesbian Arab Society (GLAS)<sup>12</sup> has a website at Yahoo Groups; however, this is only accessible for members of the group.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. Is lesbian activity illegal?

Homosexuality is not explicitly prohibited under Egyptian Law; however the local authorities have used existing legal provisions on “prostitution”, “debauchery”, “contempt of religion” and “public morality” to prosecute homosexuals. The most common charge is that of “habitual debauchery” under Article 9(c) of Law 10/1961 which states that “Anyone who habitually engages in debauchery or prostitution is liable to a penalty of three months to three years imprisonment and/or a fine of LE 25-300”.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lindström, C. 2009, *Narratives of Lesbian Existence in Egypt – Coming to Terms with Identities*, Bachelor thesis, Stockholm University, p. 7

<http://mena.orient.su.se/upps/Narratives%20of%20Lesbian%20Existence%20in%20Egypt%20-%20Coming%20to%20Terms%20with%20Identities.pdf> - Accessed 6 May 2010 - Attachment 3;

<sup>8</sup> DIMIA Country Information Service 2005, *Issues Brief: Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt*, September, p. 8 – Attachment 1.

<sup>9</sup> Lindström, C. 2009, *Narratives of Lesbian Existence in Egypt – Coming to Terms with Identities*, Bachelor thesis, Stockholm University, pp. 5 & 26

<http://mena.orient.su.se/upps/Narratives%20of%20Lesbian%20Existence%20in%20Egypt%20-%20Coming%20to%20Terms%20with%20Identities.pdf> - Accessed 6 May 2010 - Attachment 3;

<sup>10</sup> DIAC Country Information Service 2009, *Issues Brief: Sexual Minorities – Egypt: An Update and Addendum to the 2005 Paper ‘Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt’*, July, p. 9 – Attachment 2

<sup>11</sup> ‘Homosexuality in Egypt’ 2005, The Egypt Blog, 8 May

<http://theegyptblog.blogspot.com/2005/05/homosexuality-in-egypt.html> - Accessed 6 May 2010 - Attachment 5.

<sup>12</sup> “GLAS is based in the USA but aims to serve the Arab community world wide. It has chapters in Egypt and Lebanon. The website includes news and articles from Arab countries, mailing lists by country and useful links.” <http://www.glas.org>.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Gay and Lesbian Arab Society – Egypt’ (undated), Yahoo Groups website, last entry September 2009 <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/glasegypt/> - Accessed 6 May 2010 - Attachment 6.

<sup>14</sup> DIMIA Country Information Service 2005, *Issues Brief: Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt*, September, p.3-4 – Attachment 1.

No references to lesbians being convicted were found. According to Lindström, Egypt's law on "debauchery" applies to gay men only.<sup>15</sup> Again, this is likely to be a result of the prevailing social attitude that lesbian relationships do not exist.

### 3. Are lesbians mistreated by police and other authorities?

Sources discussing the treatment of gays and lesbians in Egypt give only examples of the mistreatment and arrests of male homosexuals.<sup>16</sup> The information indicates that male homosexuals do face discrimination and harm in Egypt. As noted in the 2009 DIAC issues brief, the situation of lesbians in Egypt is hard to gauge as they are "virtually invisible" in Egypt and so little information is available.<sup>17</sup>

The 2009 DIAC issues brief includes credible reports of routine arrests of male homosexuals over recent years, but only one mention of women being arrested. The report states: "two lesbian women were reported by one source to have been arrested on the Queen Boat in 2001, but were later released when two men assisted them by claiming to be married to them. No confirmation of this story was located."<sup>18</sup> [The "Queen Boat" incident was a highly publicised police raid in 2001 on a Cairo disco frequented by gay men, in which over 50 men were arrested. For more information on the "Queen Boat" incident, see Human Rights Watch 2004, *In a Time of Torture: The Assault on Justice in Egypt's Crackdown on Homosexual Conduct*<sup>19</sup>].

Lindström states that there have been no similar crackdowns on lesbians in Egypt, and they have not been subjected to the same kind of state scrutiny and persecution.<sup>20</sup> Again, this would largely be due to the extreme secrecy of the community. Lindström also cites a 2003 paper on lesbian identities in the Arab world, which notes that the subject of female homosexuality is often treated with dismissal and states that "erotic relations among women...are considered no real threat to the dominant heterosexual system as long as they remain undercover, or in the closet."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Lindström, C. 2009, *Narratives of Lesbian Existence in Egypt – Coming to Terms with Identities*, Bachelor thesis, Stockholm University, p. 4

<http://mena.orient.su.se/upps/Narratives%20of%20Lesbian%20Existence%20in%20Egypt%20-%20Coming%20to%20Terms%20with%20Identities.pdf> - Accessed 6 May 2010 - Attachment 3

<sup>16</sup> DIAC Country Information Service 2009, *Issues Brief: Sexual Minorities – Egypt: An Update and Addendum to the 2005 Paper 'Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt'*, July – Attachment 2; DIMIA Country Information Service 2005, *Issues Brief: Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt*, September – Attachment 1.

<sup>17</sup> DIAC Country Information Service 2009, *Issues Brief: Sexual Minorities – Egypt: An Update and Addendum to the 2005 Paper 'Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt'*, July, p. 9 – Attachment 2

<sup>18</sup> DIAC Country Information Service 2009, *Issues Brief: Sexual Minorities – Egypt: An Update and Addendum to the 2005 Paper 'Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt'*, July, p. 6 – Attachment 2

<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch 2004, *In a Time of Torture: The Assault on Justice in Egypt's Crackdown on Homosexual Conduct* - Attachment 7.

<sup>20</sup> Lindström, C. 2009, *Narratives of Lesbian Existence in Egypt – Coming to Terms with Identities*, Bachelor thesis, Stockholm University, p. 4

<http://mena.orient.su.se/upps/Narratives%20of%20Lesbian%20Existence%20in%20Egypt%20-%20Coming%20to%20Terms%20with%20Identities.pdf> - Accessed 6 May 2010 - Attachment 3.

<sup>21</sup> Lindström, C. 2009, *Narratives of Lesbian Existence in Egypt – Coming to Terms with Identities*, Bachelor thesis, Stockholm University, p. 13

<http://mena.orient.su.se/upps/Narratives%20of%20Lesbian%20Existence%20in%20Egypt%20-%20Coming%20to%20Terms%20with%20Identities.pdf> - Accessed 6 May 2010 - Attachment 3

Country Advice EGY36002, dated 22 January 2010, provides information on the current situation for male homosexuals in Egypt, including a rundown of events from 2007 to present.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. Are lesbians subjected to serious social/family discrimination/harassment?

While there are some incidents of harassment of lesbians who have revealed their sexuality to their family<sup>23</sup>, no incidents of social harassment were found. Lesbians rarely make themselves known to anyone other than other lesbians. Anecdotal evidence, from the personal stories narrated by lesbian interviewees, indicates that female homosexuality (like male homosexuality) is considered an aberration. The women interviewed for Lindström's thesis all choose to pass as heterosexual, as they fear what would happen to them if they were known as lesbians. One interviewee states that "In the street, if they know you are a lesbian, just like anywhere else, you can be beaten."<sup>24</sup> Most have hidden the truth from their families as well. Many examples were given of families seeking psychiatric help for a "cure".<sup>25</sup>

The 2009 DIAC issues brief quotes a 2006 *New York Times* article which states that: "Women have not been subject to the same kind of attacks that men have been in Egypt, perhaps because of their relative invisibility."<sup>26</sup> The issues brief states that "No mention has been found of lesbians making themselves known to anyone other than other lesbians. It is therefore unclear whether they can avail themselves of police protection." With regard to gay men, the issues brief notes that "no mention has been found of State protection being provided to anyone who is considered or suspected of being gay."<sup>27</sup>

In relation to homosexuality more generally, the 2005 and 2009 issues briefs provide a comprehensive overview of prevailing social attitudes towards homosexuals in Egypt.<sup>28</sup> They note information sources which claim that men who reveal their homosexuality are met with hostility because homosexuality is considered a stigma in Egyptian society and, as a result, many homosexuals do not 'come out' to their families.<sup>29</sup> Human Rights Watch has also claimed that the local media has encouraged the perception that homosexuals were a "menacing, manifold group, endangering the nation" and that during the "Queen

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<sup>22</sup> RRT Country Advice 2010, *Country Advice EGY36002*, 22 January - Attachment 8.

<sup>23</sup> Lindström, C. 2009, *Narratives of Lesbian Existence in Egypt – Coming to Terms with Identities*, Bachelor thesis, Stockholm University

<http://mena.orient.su.se/upps/Narratives%20of%20Lesbian%20Existence%20in%20Egypt%20-%20Coming%20to%20Terms%20with%20Identities.pdf> - Accessed 6 May 2010 - Attachment 3.

<sup>24</sup> Lindström, C. 2009, *Narratives of Lesbian Existence in Egypt – Coming to Terms with Identities*, Bachelor thesis, Stockholm University, p. 34

<http://mena.orient.su.se/upps/Narratives%20of%20Lesbian%20Existence%20in%20Egypt%20-%20Coming%20to%20Terms%20with%20Identities.pdf> - Accessed 6 May 2010 - Attachment 3.

<sup>25</sup> Lindström, C. 2009, *Narratives of Lesbian Existence in Egypt – Coming to Terms with Identities*, Bachelor thesis, Stockholm University, p. 35

<http://mena.orient.su.se/upps/Narratives%20of%20Lesbian%20Existence%20in%20Egypt%20-%20Coming%20to%20Terms%20with%20Identities.pdf> - Accessed 6 May 2010 - Attachment 3; DIAC Country Information Service 2009, *Issues Brief: Sexual Minorities – Egypt: An Update and Addendum to the 2005 Paper 'Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt'*, July, p. 10 – Attachment 2.

<sup>26</sup> DIAC Country Information Service 2009, *Issues Brief: Sexual Minorities – Egypt: An Update and Addendum to the 2005 Paper 'Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt'*, July, p. 9 – Attachment 2.

<sup>27</sup> DIAC Country Information Service 2009, *Issues Brief: Sexual Minorities – Egypt: An Update and Addendum to the 2005 Paper 'Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt'*, July, p. 6 – Attachment 2.

<sup>28</sup> DIMIA Country Information Service 2005, *Issues Brief: Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt*, September, p.10 – Attachment 1; DIAC Country Information Service 2009, *Issues Brief: Sexual Minorities – Egypt: An Update and Addendum to the 2005 Paper 'Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt'*, July, p.10 – Attachment 2.

<sup>29</sup> DIMIA Country Information Service 2005, *Issues Brief: Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt*, September, pp. 12-13 – Attachment 1.

Boat Case” the men were described as “devil-worshippers” who practised “perverted activities” and took “pornographic photographs”.<sup>30</sup>

The attitude within the Coptic Church towards homosexuality is also relevant here. Lindström states that “both the Muslim community and the Christian community in Egypt condemn homosexuality”.<sup>31</sup> The 2005 DIMIA issues brief includes the following information on homosexuality and the Coptic Church, noting that homosexual practices are regarded as “sinful” and that the leader of the Coptic Church has said that “he supports the government’s efforts to eliminate the ‘plague’ of homosexuality”:

The Coptic Orthodox Church regards homosexual practices as sinful. The church argues that homosexuality not only contradicts biblical teachings, but also “poses a serious threat to the stability of the family unit, the morals of society, the purity of the Church, and the future of ecumenical unity”. The Coptic Church disapproves same-sex marriages and the ordination of homosexual clergy.

Pope Shenouda III, the leader of Egypt’s Coptic Orthodox Church told Egypt’s state-run Middle East News Agency that he supports the government’s efforts to eliminate the “plague” of homosexuality. Acceptance of gay marriage, according to Pope Shenouda III, “defies the teachings of the holy book and threatens the stability of marriage, the foundation of families, the sanctity of the church and social morality”.<sup>32</sup>

## Attachments

1. DIMIA Country Information Service 2005, *Issues Brief: Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt*, September. (CISNET Egypt EGY090905)
2. DIAC Country Information Service 2009, *Issues Brief: Sexual Minorities – Egypt: An Update and Addendum to the 2005 Paper ‘Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt’*, July. (CISNET Egypt EGY060709)
3. Lindström, C. 2009, *Narratives of Lesbian Existence in Egypt – Coming to Terms with Identities*, Bachelor thesis, Stockholm University  
<http://mena.orient.su.se/upps/Narratives%20of%20Lesbian%20Existence%20in%20Egypt%20-%20Coming%20to%20Terms%20with%20Identities.pdf> - Accessed 6 May 2010.
4. Jama, A. 2003, “A few good women”, *Huriyah Magazine*, September. (CISNET Egypt CX126890)
5. ‘Homosexuality in Egypt’ 2005, The Egypt Blog, 8 May  
<http://theegyptblog.blogspot.com/2005/05/homosexuality-in-egypt.html> - Accessed 6 May 2010.
6. ‘Gay and Lesbian Arab Society – Egypt’ (undated), Yahoo Groups website, last entry September 2009 <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/glasegypt/> - Accessed 6 May 2010.

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<sup>30</sup> DIMIA Country Information Service 2005, *Issues Brief: Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt*, September, pp. 13-14 – Attachment 1.

<sup>31</sup> Lindström, C. 2009, *Narratives of Lesbian Existence in Egypt – Coming to Terms with Identities*, Bachelor thesis, Stockholm University, p. 29  
<http://mena.orient.su.se/upps/Narratives%20of%20Lesbian%20Existence%20in%20Egypt%20-%20Coming%20to%20Terms%20with%20Identities.pdf> - Accessed 6 May 2010 - Attachment 3.

<sup>32</sup> DIMIA Country Information Service 2005, *Issues Brief: Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt*, September, pp. 15-16 – Attachment 1.



7. Human Rights Watch 2004, *In a Time of Torture: The Assault on Justice in Egypt's Crackdown on Homosexual Conduct*. (CISNET Egypt 17379)
8. RRT Country Advice 2010, *Country Advice EGY36002*, 22 January.