



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Egypt

Egypt – EGY35828 – Copts – Military service
15 December 2009

1 Are there any recent reports suggesting that Christian Copts are at risk of serious harm when they do compulsory military service?

Few recent reports could be located on the mistreatment of Coptic conscripts in the Egyptian military, and there does not appear to be any serious risk of harm for Copts undergoing national service. The three reports that were located emanate from the websites of Coptic advocacy groups such as Copts United and The Free Copts, or from the *Assyrian International News Agency*. These reports, while widely disseminated on Coptic advocacy, Christian, and anti-Islamic websites, do not appear to have been published in any other news, governmental, or NGO websites.

Nonetheless, research carried out for previous responses suggests that Copts in Egypt, while able to practise their religion freely, are at risk of mistreatment and violence at the hands of state security forces and non-state actors, particularly in non-urban locales.¹

In an October 2009 article, which is sourced from the *Assyrian International News Agency* (website available at <http://www.aina.org>), the author claims that the mistreatment of Coptic conscripts in the Egyptian military is “rarely reported by conscripts for fear of reprisals”. The report also quotes a Copt who claims that “conscripts who are targeted for enforced Islamisation are those who have no school education...; their families are poor and easily intimidated by the authorities should their sons be harmed”.² While reproductions of this report were located on Coptic rights advocacy websites, other Christian rights websites, and on websites with an anti-Islamic slant, no other major news, governmental or NGO websites carried the report.

The only other report from 2009 concerning Coptic conscripts was sourced from the Copts United website, and distributed by the Christian rights advocacy group *Compass Direct*, who stated on 22 May that “three Muslims repeatedly stabbed Coptic Christian Girgis Yousry, 21, as the army conscript was leaving the gates of the church of Saint Mary in Minya, Upper Egypt on May 2, according to Copts United”. It is not made clear whether the attack is related to Yousry’s status as a conscript, or that the attackers had any links to the Egyptian military.³

In August 2006, a post on The Arabist blog website reports that The Free Copts website (website available at <http://freecopts.net/english/>) was the source of reports “circulating among the Egyptian leftist Yahoo! Groups” which claimed that Coptic conscript “Hani Sarofim was tortured to death by his commander to force his conversion to Islam”. This blog

¹ For two recent responses addressing the situation for Copts in Egypt, see: RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response EGY35308*, 18 August – Attachment 1; and: RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response EGY35653*, 4 November – Attachment 2.

² Abdelmassih, M. 2009, ‘Forced Islamisation of Christian Conscripts in the Egyptian Army’, *Assyrian International News Agency*, 12 October <http://www.aina.org/news/20091012150443.htm> – Accessed 8 December 2009 – Attachment 3.

³ ‘Stabbing, bombing attacks strike near two churches’ 2009, *Compass Direct*, (source: Copts United website), 22 May – Attachment 4.

post claims that The Free Copts website has “previously reported on some serious abuses that did indeed happen, but there were other cases which they blew out of proportion”. The author of the post also states that he had been in contact with a human rights activist in Egypt, who stated that it was a “[d]isgrace that not a single newspaper has dared to report the death yet”.⁴ The initial report from The Free Copts website could not be located, and no other source appears to carry the report.

List of Attachments

- 1 RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response EGY35308*, 18 August.
- 2 RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response EGY35653*, 4 November.
- 3 Abdelmassih, M. 2009, ‘Forced Islamisation of Christian Conscripts in the Egyptian Army’, *Assyrian International News Agency*, 12 October
<http://www.aina.org/news/20091012150443.htm> – Accessed 8 December 2009.
- 4 ‘Stabbing, bombing attacks strike near two churches’ 2009, *Compass Direct*, (source: Copts United website), 22 May. (CISNET Egypt CX226875)
- 5 el-Hamalawy, H. 2006, ‘Coptic conscript tortured to death?’, The Arabist blog website, 19 August <http://arabist.net/archives/2006/08/19/coptic-conscript-tortured-to-death/> – Accessed 15 December 2009.

⁴ el-Hamalawy, H. 2006, ‘Coptic conscript tortured to death?’, The Arabist blog website, 19 August <http://arabist.net/archives/2006/08/19/coptic-conscript-tortured-to-death/> – Accessed 15 December 2009 – Attachment 5. It may be of interest to note that this incident is also mentioned in the October 2009 report from the *Assyrian International News Agency*; no further references could be located to corroborate this report.