Australian Government

Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice Egypt

Egypt – EGY37742 – Evangelical Christians – Muslims – State protection

1 December 2010

1. Please indicate whether Evangelical Christianity falls under a particular church (Pentecostal) or other grouping in Egypt.

The term 'Evangelical' in Arabic is *ingili* or *injili*, which is a broad term that does not refer to a specific denomination, but rather to various Protestant Christian church denominations that proselytise or seek to convert those of other faiths.[1] The Protestant Christian community in Egypt comprises 16 denominations, including the Anglican, Baptist, Brethren, Pentecostal and Presbyterian churches.[2] The term 'Coptic Evangelical' is also used to describe Copts who proselytise or attempt to convert those of other faiths.[3]

2. Are there any reports of attacks on Evangelical Christians by Muslims in Egypt?

One report dated 24 March 2010, was found detailing attacks on Evangelical Christians in Egypt. There are also reports of Coptic Christians being attacked, and reports of attacks on Christians that do not make reference to the denomination of the victims or whether or not their faith was evangelical in nature. Coptic Christians comprise 9 per cent of the Egyptian population and other Christian denominations make up 1 per cent.[4] Due to the difference in numbers, it is possible that attacks on Coptic Christians are more widely reported, and that reports that do not specify the denomination of the victims could include Christians who undertake evangelical activities.

Evangelical Christians

On 18 March 2010, an evangelical pastor and his wife were reportedly evicted from their house and assaulted by Egyptian authorities when their church was being demolished. The pastor's wife said that 'two men went into her flat and evacuated her by force, by slapping her face, pulling her by her clothes and dragging her by her hair'. While the article did not

[1] Badr, H. 2000, 'The Protestant Evangelical Community in the Middle East: Impact On Cultural and Societal Developments', *International Review of Mission*, vol. 89, no. 352, pp. 60–69 – Attachment 1; Cornetta, A. 2009, 'Friction Among Egypt's Christians', 16 October, *Bikya Masr*, http://bikyamasr.com/wordpress/?p=4867 – Accessed 23 November 2010 – Attachment 2.
[2] US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010* – Egypt, 17 November – Attachment 3.
[3] Cornetta, A. 2009, 'Friction Among Egypt's Christians', 16 October, *Bikya Masr*, http://bikyamasr.com/wordpress/?p=4867 – Accessed 23 November 2010 – Attachment 2.
[4] US Department of State 2010, *Background Note: Egypt*, 10 November, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5309.htm – Accessed 29 November 2010 – Attachment 4.

mention the religion of the authorities, given that Egypt is a predominantly Muslim country it is likely that the authorities were Islamic.[5]

Evangelical behaviour seeks to proselytise to or convert those of other faiths. According to the 2010 *International Religious Freedom Report*, 'Islam is the official state religion [in Egypt], and the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law) are the primary sources of legislation.'[6] Shari'a law prohibits conversion from Islam (also known as 'apostasy', a crime punishable by death), and it is thus likely that the activities of evangelical Christians could motivate attacks by Muslims and/or attract negative attention from Egyptian authorities.[7]

Christians generally

The 2010 *International Religious Freedom Report* notes several incidents of interreligious violence against Christians, but the report does not note the denomination of those targeted. The report notes that in Minya (also El-Menia), a governorate in Upper Egypt, there were 21 incidents of interreligious violence from January 2008 to January 2010, which is 'the highest percentage of all governorates in the country'. The report quotes the director of activist group Egyptians Against Religious Discrimination as stating in January 2010, 'I think the sectarian violence, or rather the violent attacks against non-Muslims in Egypt, has been escalating in the past year.' Four incidents of violence against Christians (mostly Coptic) were specifically mentioned in the report, occurring between October 2009 and March 2010.[8]

A report from the *Jubilee Campaign*, an organisation that provides legal assistance to persecuted Christians around the world, states that Christians experience discrimination under Egyptian law. The report also notes that Christians are 'all too often subjected to violent persecution at the hands of the country's Muslim majority – particularly by its concentration of Islamic extremists.' While the report makes mention that Christians fall under several denominations in Egypt, it does not identify the denominations of the individuals targeted in descriptions of specific attacks. The report lists eight attacks on Christians and forced conversions to Islam between 1999 and 2006, the most recent being knife attacks outside churches and arson attacks.[9]

Coptic Christians

There are several recent reports of attacks on Coptic Christians by Muslims, and while it is possible that evangelical Copts were among those targeted, reports do not mention this. The following are recent reports of Coptic Christians being attacked in Egypt:

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[5] Abdelmassih , M. 2010, 'Egyptian State Security Demolishes Evangelical Church, Assaults Pastor', *Assyrian International News Agency*, 24 March, http://www.aina.org/news/20100323193843.htm – Accessed 23 November 2010 – Attachment 5.
[6] US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010* – Egypt, 17 November – Attachment 3.
[7] Beehner, L. 2007, 'Religious Conversion and Sharia Law', *Council on Foreign Relations*, 8 June, http://www.cfr.org/publication/13552/religious_conversion_and_sharia_law.html#p2 – Accessed 1 December 2010 – Attachment 6.
[8] US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010* – Egypt, 17 November – Attachment 3.
[9] Note: Jubilee Campaign is a Christian advocacy group based in the United States. 'Egypt profile', undated, *Jubilee Campaign*, http://www.jubileecampaign.org/home/jubilee/egypt_profile.pdf – Accessed 25 November 2010 – Attachment 7.

- On 15 November 2010, a group of Muslims set fire to Christian homes in Abu Tesht, in southern Egypt, after rumours that a Christian man was romantically involved with a young Muslim woman.[10]

- On 13 August 2010, an Imam allegedly called for violence against Christians during Friday prayers in the village of Shimi. Following the prayers, Muslim men assaulted eleven Coptic Christians over two days.[11]

- On 7 January 2010, six Copts died and nine were injured after Muslims attacked a church in Nag Hamadi.[12]

- On 2 May 2009, a Coptic Christian was stabbed by three Muslim men as he was leaving a church service in Minya, Upper Egypt.[13]

External advice suggests that Coptic Christians who have a tattoo of the Christian cross, usually on their arm, may be targeted by Muslims. In correspondence with the Tribunal dated 25 February 2010, Dr Gennaro Gervasio, a lecturer in Politics and International Relations at Macquarie University, stated that he is 'fully aware of Copts being mocked and harassed because they were wearing religious symbols (in particular the tattooed cross on the arm).[14]

Information included in Question 6 of *Research Response EGY37584* notes that Coptic Christians are subjected to official and societal discrimination and violence. This violence increased in 2009 and has continued in 2010.[15]

3. Are the authorities willing and able to protect Evangelical Christians?

Little information was found regarding the protection of evangelical Christians by authorities in Egypt; however, there is information about the treatment of Coptic Christians and Christians in general by authorities. While the Egyptian constitution allows for freedom of religious belief and practice, there are reports of authorities arresting Christians arbitrarily and mistreating them whilst in custody. Some reports have stated that when Christians have reported incidents of violence against them to police, the police response has precluded the Muslim perpetrators from being charged. Conversely, it has also been reported that police are providing ample security for Christian churches

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[10] Miskin, M. 2010, 'Egyptian Muslims Attack Christians over Romance Rumors', *Israel National News*, 16 November, http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/140679 – Accessed 25 November 2010 – Attachment 8; Barker, A. 2010, 'Christians under attack in Egypt', *ABC News*, 17 November, http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/11/17/3068382.htm – Accessed 25 November 2010 – Attachment 9.
[11] Abdelmassih, M. 2010, 'Muslim Cleric Calls for Jihad, Coptic Christians Attacked in Egypt', *Assyrian International News Agency*, 14 August, http://www.aina.org/news/20100814184359.htm – Accessed 29 November 2010 – Attachment 10.
[12] Hauslohner, A. 2010, 'Egypt Gripped by Rising Muslim-Christian Tensions', *Time Magazine, 8 November*, http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2029977,00.html – Accessed 29 November 2010 – Attachment 11; Mauro, M. 2010, 'EGYPT/ Christians Again Under Attack', *Ilsussidiario*, 9 January, http://www.ilsussidiario.net/articolo.aspx?articolo=60336 – Accessed 29 November 2010 – Attachment 12.
[13] 'Egypt: Stabbing, Bombing Attacks Near Two Churches' 2009, opendoors.org.au website, 23 May, http://www.opendoors.org.au/article/47/egypt-stabbing-bombing-attacks-near-two-churches – Accessed 29 November 2010 – Attachment 13.
[14] Gervasio, Gennaro 2010, Email from Gennaro Gervasio: Country Information Request EGY36097: 'Coptic Christians in the Egyptian Military', 25 February – Attachment 14.
[15] RRT Research & Information 2010, *Research Response EGY37584*, 4 November – Attachment 15.

following a threat made against Egyptian Christians in October 2010 by Muslims in Baghdad, Iraq.

Evangelical Christians

There are reports that 'Protestant Coptic Christians' and evangelical Christians have been arrested by Egyptian authorities arbitrarily and mistreated whilst in custody. An article from the *Assyrian International News Agency* reports that an Evangelical church pastor and his wife were assaulted by authorities in March 2010 when their church was demolished. The article states:

> [A] 500-man force of Central Security and State Security blocked all roads leading to the Church compound, forced their way in and broke into the pastor's residence, dragging the family out by force.[16]

In October 2009, conservative American news website *Right Side News* reported that a 'Protestant Copt' was illegally detained by police for four days in Egypt for handing out Christian pamphlets. Whilst the man was in custody, the article reported, he 'remained in handcuffs for hours, was thrown to the ground, spit [sic] upon and threatened with violence'. The article noted that Muslims in Egypt are allowed to promote their faith using 'books, pamphlets and loudspeakers', whereas Christians are not.[17] The 2010 *International Religious Freedom Report* confirms this information, noting that while Christian proselytising to Muslims is not illegal in Egypt, the government restricts such activities. The report states that 'police have detained or otherwise harassed those accused of proselytizing on charges of ridiculing or insulting heavenly religions or inciting sectarian strife'.[18] Converts from Islam to Christianity are also reportedly routinely harassed by authorities, as the Egyptian government does not recognise religious conversion from Islam.[19]

Christians generally

The Egyptian constitution allows for freedom of religious belief and religious practice. A 2007 *Human Rights Watch* report states:

> Article 40 of Egypt's constitution guarantees equal rights to all citizens and prohibits discrimination based on religion […] Article 46 states that "the State shall guarantee freedom of belief and the freedom to practice religious rites."[20]

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[16] Abdelmassih , M. 2010, 'Egyptian State Security Demolishes Evangelical Church, Assaults Pastor', *Assyrian International News Agency*, 24 March, http://www.aina.org/news/20100323193843.htm – Accessed 23 November 2010 – Attachment 5.

[17] Morris, W. 2009, 'Christian Arrested for Distributing Tracts in Egypt', *Right Side News*, 7 October, http://www.rightsidenews.com/200910076748/world/terrorism/christian-arrested-for-distributing-tracts-in-egypt.html – Accessed 30 November 2010 – Attachment 16.

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

[19] King, W. 2010, 'Anti-Christian Sentiment in Egypt Heats Up: Terrorist threat in Iraq emerges at importune moment for Copts', *Kopten*, 24 November, http://www.kopten.at/kopten/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=471&catid=78 – Accessed 25 November 2010 – Attachment 17; US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010* – Egypt, 17 November – Attachment 3.

[20] Human Rights Watch, 2007, 'Prohibited Identities: State interference with religious freedom', *HRW* Website, November, http://hrw.org/reports/2007/egypt1107/egypt1107webwcover.pdf – Accessed 23 November 2010 – Attachment 18.

In practice, however, the government places restrictions on this constitutional freedom. According to the 2010 *International Religious Freedom Report*, the government encourages victims of interreligious violence to agree to 'reconciliation sessions' instead of prosecuting the perpetrators of violence against Copts, which 'generally precluded recourse to the judicial system for restitution'.[21] This information is illustrated in a report from the *Assyrian International News Agency*, which describes an incident in which a group of about 20 Muslim men assaulted a Coptic Christian in August 2010. The police took the Christian victims to the police station and allegedly pressured them into accepting a reconciliation agreement. The report states that none of the Muslim perpetrators were arrested.[22] Another report located suggests that Christian victims of sectarian violence are often 'forced' to agree to the reconciliation process because a Shari'a provision states that Christians cannot testify against Muslims in court.[23] A country report from the *Jubilee Campaign* notes that '[p]olice and other Egyptian authorities have shown little interest in protecting Christian victims or prosecuting attackers'.[24]

Recent reports of Muslim threats against Christians have resulted in increased police security for Christian churches. On 31 October 2010, it was reported that a group of Islamic extremists burst into a Christian church in Baghdad and opened fire. The assault, it was reported, came 'in response to the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt allegedly holding two Coptic women against their will who, [the perpetrators] and some others believe, converted to Islam'.[25] As a result, the Egyptian authorities provided security for Christian churches, fearing similar attacks in Egypt. A report noted that 'the number of uniformed and plain-clothes officers has doubled at churches […] At times, parking on the same side of the street as a church building, or even driving by one, has been forbidden'.[26] This indicates that there are instances where police do provide protection to Christians in Egypt.

Coptic Christians

Information included in Question 6 of *Research Response EGY37584* notes that police protection for Coptic Christians is generally inadequate and authorities often failed to prosecute perpetrators of crimes against Copts.[27]

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[21] US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010* – Egypt, 17 November – Attachment 3.
[22] Abdelmassih, M. 2010, 'Muslim Cleric Calls for Jihad, Coptic Christians Attacked in Egypt', *Assyrian International News Agency*, 14 August, http://www.aina.org/news/20100814184359.htm – Accessed 29 November 2010 – Attachment 10.
[23] 'Christian community attacked by Muslims in Egypt', 2010, *DVD Tract*, 3 September, http://dvdtract.com/christian-community-attacked-by-muslims-in-egypt/ – Accessed 26 November – Attachment 19.
[24] 'Egypt profile', undated, *Jubilee Campaign*, http://www.jubileecampaign.org/home/jubilee/egypt_profile.pdf – Accessed 25 November 2010 – Attachment 7.
[25] King, W. 2010, 'Anti-Christian Sentiment in Egypt Heats Up: Terrorist threat in Iraq emerges at importune moment for Copts', *Kopten*, 24 November, http://www.kopten.at/kopten/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=471&catid=78 – Accessed 25 November 2010 – Attachment 17.
[26] King, W. 2010, 'Anti-Christian Sentiment in Egypt Heats Up: Terrorist threat in Iraq emerges at importune moment for Copts', *Kopten*, 24 November, http://www.kopten.at/kopten/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=471&catid=78 – Accessed 25 November 2010 – Attachment 17.
[27] RRT Research & Information 2010, *Research Response EGY37584*, 4 November – Attachment 15.

Attachments

1. Badr, H. 2000, 'The Protestant Evangelical Community in the Middle East: Impact On Cultural and Societal Developments', *International Review of Mission*, vol. 89, no. 352, pp. 60–69.

2. Cornetta, A. 2009, 'Friction Among Egypt's Christians', 16 October, *Bikya Masr*, http://bikyamasr.com/wordpress/?p=4867 – Accessed 23 November 2010.

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

4. US Department of State 2010, *Background Note: Egypt*, 10 November, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5309.htm – Accessed 29 November 2010.

5. Abdelmassih, M. 2010, 'Egyptian State Security Demolishes Evangelical Church, Assaults Pastor', *Assyrian International News Agency*, 24 March, http://www.aina.org/news/20100323193843.htm – Accessed 23 November 2010.

6. Beehner, L. 2007, 'Religious Conversion and Sharia Law', *Council on Foreign Relations*, 8 June, http://www.cfr.org/publication/13552/religious_conversion_and_sharia_law.html#p2 – Accessed 1 December 2010.

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8. Miskin, M. 2010, 'Egyptian Muslims Attack Christians over Romance Rumors', *Israel National News*, 16 November, http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/140679 – Accessed 25 November 2010.

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11. Hauslohner, A. 2010, 'Egypt Gripped by Rising Muslim-Christian Tensions', *Time Magazine, 8 November*, http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2029977,00.html – Accessed 29 November 2010.

12. Mauro, M. 2010, 'EGYPT/ Christians Again Under Attack', *Ilsussidiario*, 9 January, http://www.ilsussidiario.net/articolo.aspx?articolo=60336 – Accessed 29 November 2010.

13. 'Egypt: Stabbing, Bombing Attacks Near Two Churches' 2009, opendoors.org.au website, 23 May, http://www.opendoors.org.au/article/47/egypt-stabbing-bombing-attacks-near-two-churches – Accessed 29 November 2010. (CISNET Egypt CX226875)

14. Gervasio, Gennaro 2010, Email from Gennaro Gervasio: Country Information Request EGY36097: 'Coptic Christians in the Egyptian Military', 25 February.

15. RRT Research & Information 2010, *Research Response EGY37584*, 4 November.

16. Morris, W. 2009, 'Christian Arrested for Distributing Tracts in Egypt', *Right Side News*, 7 October, http://www.rightsidenews.com/200910076748/world/terrorism/christian-arrested-for-distributing-tracts-in-egypt.html – Accessed 30 November 2010.

17. King, W. 2010, 'Anti-Christian Sentiment in Egypt Heats Up: Terrorist threat in Iraq emerges at importune moment for Copts', *Kopten*, 24 November, http://www.kopten.at/kopten/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=471&catid=78 – Accessed 25 November 2010.

18. Human Rights Watch, 2007, 'Prohibited Identities: State interference with religious freedom', *HRW* Website, November, http://hrw.org/reports/2007/egypt1107/egypt1107webwcover.pdf – Accessed 23 November 2010.

19. 'Christian community attacked by Muslims in Egypt', 2010, *DVD Tract*, 3 September, http://dvdtract.com/christian-community-attacked-by-muslims-in-egypt/ – Accessed 26 November.