Australian Government

Refugee Review Tribunal

# Country Advice Egypt

## Egypt – EGY36322 – Coptic Orthodox Church – Forced Conversion from Islam – Arrest and Detention of Coptic Christians – Treatment of Coptic Christians involved in Conversions from Islam

9 March 2010

1. **What knowledge would a deacon and Sunday school teacher have of (i) the Coptic Orthodox Church organisation in Egypt, and (ii) Coptic Christian beliefs and liturgy? As to the latter, would a deacon and Sunday school teacher be expected to know all or some of the matters mentioned in the overview entitled "The Coptic Orthodox Church" posted on the USA Coptic Church website? If not all, what matters could the person be expected to know?**

It is reasonable to expect that a person who holds the position of deacon within the Coptic Church would be familiar with the role description and the associated responsibilities. The role of a deacon in the Coptic Orthodox Church is described in a 2003 paper written by Richard Rymarz and Marian de Souza of the Australian Catholic University, who argue that a significant feature of Coptic life is the incorporation of young males into the Church through formalised roles such as that of a deacon:

> Deacons are part of the ordained ministry and play an important role in the liturgical, life of the Church. Deacons are ordained by the bishop, thereby giving them status and dignity…It is not unusual for a young Coptic male to be a deacon of the Church. There are a number of grades of diaconate to accommodate different levels of maturity and commitment but all of these give the young Copts a sense that they are part of the Church in a clear and absolute way.[1]

The five grades of the Holy Order of the Deaconate are archdeacon; deacon; sub-deacon; reader and chanter (or psalter). The responsibilities of those at the level of deacon include:

> • Help in preparation of the bread, wine, vessels, candles, books and the Sanctuary for the Divine Liturgy
> • Keep the order in the church. Assist the bishop and priest. Hold the chalice of the Blood of Christ. Guard the Holy Mysteries during Communion
> • Visit and teach the congregation
> • Instruct the congregation on actions such as bowing their heads, standing up and giving each one the sign of peace.[2]

Advice provided by DFAT on 7 May 2007 states that Sunday school classes (referred to as Friday school in Egypt) are taken by leaders of the Coptic Church and often begin with the recital of prayers. Individuals in more senior leadership positions occasionally hold sermons for larger groups of followers. The advice indicates that leadership positions

[1] Rymarz, R. and de Souza, M. 2003, 'Maintaining Identity: An Examination of Coptic Orthodox Young Adults', Hartford Institute for Religion Research website, 15 August http://hirr.hartsem.edu/sociology/rymarz.html – Accessed 15 March 2010 – Attachment 1

[2] 'Deacons' (undated), Virgin Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church website http://www.virginmarybrisbane.org/services/deacons – Accessed 15 March 2010 – Attachment 2

within the Coptic Church are informal and are usually held by men, and that a parishioner would only rise to a leadership position "after many years within the Church".[3]

Considering that one of the responsibilities of a deacon is to "teach the congregation",[4] it is likely that they would have developed sufficient knowledge of the main beliefs, traditions and structure of the Coptic Church in Egypt over a number of years to be able to teach classes and sermons and lead in prayers; although it is unclear as to what is taught in Sunday school classes in Alexandria. The lack of information regarding the teachings offered in Sunday school in Alexandria makes it difficult to determine the extent of an individual's historical knowledge regarding the establishment of the Coptic Orthodox Church; however if well-educated, an individual may be familiar with some of the historical background provided in the overview 'The Coptic Orthodox Church', and some of the modern Coptic literary men referred to, as well as the structure of the Coptic language and writings. In addition, it would be expected that such an individual would have knowledge of the basic fundamental beliefs of the Church outlined in this paper, which will be discussed further below.[5]

## Coptic Orthodox Church Organisation in Egypt

The Coptic Orthodox Church was formed in Alexandria between 55 and 68 A.D. by St Mark, an apostle, who is regarded as the first Pope of Alexandria, the head of the Coptic Church's clergy. The Pope today is Pope Shenouda III, the 117th Pope of Alexandria, whose Cathedral is located in Cairo. Copts do not regard the Pope as infallible. The Holy Synod constitutes "the highest ecclesiastical body in the church and is responsible for the church's spiritual, ecclesiastical, structural, organizational and economic affairs". The Holy Synod is divided into seven subcommittees which manage "pastoral affairs, liturgical affairs, ecumenical relations, monastic affairs, faith and ethics, and diocesan affairs"; although there also exists a Coptic Lay Council which serves as a liaison between the government of Egypt and the Coptic Church, and through which ordinary Coptic Christians can be involved in Church affairs.[6] [7] [8]

## Coptic Christian Beliefs and Liturgy

A well-educated individual in a leadership role within the Coptic Church, such as a deacon and Sunday school teacher, would also likely be aware of the main Coptic sacraments, services and beliefs as follows:

- The Church believes in Jesus Christ, the Son of Man (Mk. 8:31, 38), Son of God (Mt. 3:17), and God (Jn. 14: 8-11), who was born through the Spirit of God to St. Mary 2,000 years ago (Mt. 1:18-23). He came to our earth to give salvation to mankind through his crucifixion on the cross (Mt. 27:27-44). After his death, Jesus was buried for three days in a tomb (Mt. 27:57-61), and on the third day his resurrection took

[3] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. 638 – Egypt: RRT Information Request: EGY31661*, 7 May – Attachment 3
[4] 'Deacons' (undated), Virgin Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church website http://www.virginmarybrisbane.org/services/deacons – Accessed 15 March 2010 – Attachment 2
[5] 'The Coptic Orthodox Church' 2008, Saint Mary and Saint Antonios Coptic Orthodox Church website, 19 June http://www.copticchurch.org/node/94 - Accessed 15 March 2010 – Attachment 4
[6] Iskander, L. and Dunn, J. 2003, 'An Overview of the Coptic Christians of Egypt', Tour Egypt website http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/copticchristians.htm – Accessed 15 March 2010 – Attachment 5
[7] 'Coptic Orthodox Church' 2009, *BBC: Religions*, 25 June http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/coptic_1.shtml – Accessed 15 March 2010 – Attachment 6
[8] 'The Coptic Orthodox Church' 2008, Saint Mary and Saint Antonios Coptic Orthodox Church website, 19 June http://www.copticchurch.org/node/94 - Accessed 15 March 2010 – Attachment 4

place (Mt. 27:62-63). He appeared to his disciples (Mt. 28:16-20) relatives, and others. After 50 days, Jesus ascended to Heaven (Mk. 16:19).[9]

- [Coptic Christians believe] that Jesus Christ has only one nature; that his divine nature and his human nature are composite and totally united – the nature of the incarnated Word, as opposed to two natures united in one person.

- The Bible is, as you would expect, the basic scripture of the Coptic Church. The first translation of the Bible into Coptic script is thought have been around the 2nd century, although few early manuscripts survive.

  The other sources are the sayings of the saints, the authenticated creeds of the holy councils, and what was recorded in the Church books, especially the ritual books.

  All these are in accord with the Holy Bible and are called as a whole 'Church Tradition'.

  Copts don't believe that God actually wrote the Bible, but that God and the Holy Spirit inspired the men who wrote down the words.

- There are three main liturgies: The liturgies of St. Basil, used throughout the year; St. Gregory, used at Christmas, Epiphany and Easter; and St. Cyril (or St. Mark).[10]

- Copts observe seven canonical sacraments: Baptism, Christmation (Confirmation), Eucharist, Confession (Penance), Orders, Matrimony, and Unction of the sick…Of all seven sacraments, only Matrimony cannot be performed during a fasting season…The Coptic Orthodox Church does not have and does not mind any civil law of the land as long as it does not interfere with the Church's sacraments.

- The main Coptic Services, like those of most other Christian churches, are held on Sundays. The service usually starts at 6.00 am or 6.30 am and lasts from four to six hours depending on each church and its priests.

  The service is composed of four parts. The first is the preparation prayer, called in Arabic the early morning prayer. This lasts only 30 minutes...the alter boys go around with incenses while chanting in the Coptic language.

  The second part is for offering, at which point a prayer is said over the holy bread. This lasts for 20 to 30 minutes.

  The third part consists of the preaching mass. Here, the priests read sections of the Old and New Testament, as well giving a sermon.

  The fourth part is the reconciliation prayer. This only lasts for 10 minutes when the priests give the people Christ's forgiveness and the people do so to each other.

  The fifth part is the Believer's mass and it lasts for the rest of the service. This is when the congregation has communion, and is supposed to be only attended by those who have been baptized and who have confessed. This strict rule is now more found in small villages in Upper Egypt, but in Cairo, one must only hear the Bible reading to be able to have communion, meaning that one cannot enter very late to the service.

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[9] 'The Coptic Orthodox Church' 2008, Saint Mary and Saint Antonios Coptic Orthodox Church website, 19 June http://www.copticchurch.org/node/94 - Accessed 15 March 2010 – Attachment 4

[10] 'Coptic Orthodox Church' 2009, *BBC: Religions*, 25 June http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/coptic_1.shtml – Accessed 15 March 2010 – Attachment 6

- The worship of Saints is expressly forbidden by the Church; however, asking for their intercessions (e.g. Marian Praise) is central in any Coptic service. Any Coptic Church is named after a Patron Saint. Among all Saints, the Virgin Saint Mary (Theotokos) occupies a special place in the heart of all Copts. [11]

## Coptic Calendar

The Coptic Calendar would also be well-known to a leader within the Coptic Church. According to a publication entitled 'The Coptic Calendar' on The Heritage of The Coptic Orthodox Church website, "[t]he Coptic Orthodox Church's liturgical life is directed by its own calendar, and the Church has remained conservative to the present day with the dating of its fasts and feasts in accordance with this calendar".[12]

An overview of the Coptic Church in Egypt provided on the Tour Egypt website cited above explains that:

> The Coptic calendar has thirteen months, twelve with thirty days each and an intercalary month at the end of the year which has five or six days depending on whether the year is a leap year or not. The year starts on September 11th in the Gregorian Calendar or on the 12th in the year before (Gregorian) Leap Years. The Coptic Leap Year follows the same rules as the Gregorian so that the extra month always has six days in the year before a Gregorian Leap Year. The names of the months and their starting dates are as follows:

| Modern Pronunciation | Start Date | Start Date Leap Year |
|---|---|---|
| Tout | 11 Sept | 12 Sept |
| Baba | 11 Oct | 12 Oct |
| Hator | 10 Nov | 11 Nov |
| Kiahk | 10 Dec | 11 Dec |
| Toba | 9 Jan | 10 Jan |
| Amshir | 8 Feb | 9 Feb |
| Baramhat | 10 Mar | - |
| Baramouda | 9 Apr | - |
| Bashans | 9 May | - |
| Paona | 8 Jun | - |
| Epep | 8 Jul | - |
| Mesra | 7 Aug | - |
| Nasie | 6 Sep | - |

Coptic Christians celebrate Christmas on 7 January, corresponding to the 29th day of the month *Kahk*. The week incorporating Easter, known as Holy Week, is particularly sacred to Coptic Christians, who have a tradition on Holy Thursday "of visiting and praying in seven Coptic Churches after mass". In addition, Coptic Christians fast for more than 210 days per year, including "the Fast of the Nativity 'Christmas' which is 45 days, the Fast of the Apostles, the Fast of the Virgin Mary, the Fast of Nineveh and of course Lent, known as "the Great fast" lasts 55 days…Other then the fasting holidays, many Copts also fast on Wednesdays and Fridays all year".[13]

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[11] Iskander, L. and Dunn, J. 2003, 'An Overview of the Coptic Christians of Egypt', Tour Egypt website http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/copticchristians.htm – Accessed 15 March 2010 – Attachment 5

[12] Dawood, K. R. B. 'The Coptic Calendar', The Heritage of The Coptic Orthodox Church website http://www.copticheritage.org/parameters/copticheritage/calendar/The_Coptic_Calendar.pdf - Accessed 17 March 2010 – Attachment 7

[13] Iskander, L. and Dunn, J. 2003, 'An Overview of the Coptic Christians of Egypt', Tour Egypt website

## 2. Please provide any information on the Virgin Mary and St Gabriel Church in Alexandria.

No information was found regarding the Virgin Mary and St Gabriel Church in Alexandria.

Google Maps shows six locations for 'The Virgin Mary Church' in Alexandria as follows; however a search for 'St Gabriel Church' did not produce any results:[14]

## 3. Are there any news reports or other information about forced conversations of Muslims to Christianity?

While a large number of alleged kidnappings and forced conversions of Coptic Christian women and girls to Islam have been reported by Christian human rights groups;[15] (although it has been argued by the US Department of State that these allegations are often exaggerated, and reports of kidnappings are disputed as most cases involve consensual conversions in order for a Coptic Christian female to marry a Muslim male)[16]; there were no reports found of alleged kidnappings or forced conversions of people from Islam to Christianity.

A report published in *The Daily News Egypt* on 11 November 2007, however, describes the detention of "three Coptic activists accused of seeking to convert Muslims to Christianity".[17]

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http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/copticchristians.htm – Accessed 15 March 2010 – Attachment 5

[14] 'The Virgin Mary Church, Alexandria, Egypt' 2010, Google Maps website http://maps.google.com.au/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geocode=&q=virgin+mary+church+alexandria+egypt&sll=-25.335448,135.745076&sspn=36.459955,55.546875&ie=UTF8&hq=virgin+mary+church&hnear=Alexandria,+Egypt&ll=31.196357,30.020142&spn=0.273119,0.694199&z=11&pw=2 – Accessed 17 March 2010 – Attachment 8

[15] Christian Solidarity International and Coptic Foundation for Human Rights 2009, 'The Disappearance, Forced Conversions, and Forced Marriages of Coptic Christian Women in Egypt', November – Attachment 9

[16] US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Egypt*, 26 October, Section II – Attachment 10

[17] 'Meca Coptic Activists Detained for Alleged Conversion Attempts' 2007, *The Daily News Egypt*, 11 November http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=10233 – Accessed 16 March 2010 – Attachment 11

4. **Would the Egyptian media publish a report of such an incident? In all cases, or only in certain circumstances?**

In reference to the alleged kidnappings and forced conversions of Coptic Christians to Islam, the US Department of State *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009* states that "[r]eports of such cases almost never appear in the local media".[18] It is unclear whether this would also be the case for reports of alleged kidnappings and forced conversions of Muslims to Christianity.

As mentioned in response to question 3, however, the report published in *The Daily News Egypt* on 11 November 2007 describes the detention of "three Coptic activists [from the Middle East Christian Association (Meca)] accused of seeking to convert Muslims to Christianity". In addition, the report explains that Egyptian country director of Meca, Adel Fawzi, and Meca photographer Peter Ezzat, were released from detention on 4 November 2007 after three months in detention on informal accusation of insulting Islam, "sedition, propagating extremist ideas through the internet and insulting religion... "for publishing articles and declarations that are damaging to Islam and insulting to Prophet Mohamed (PBUH) on the United Copts website"".[19]

In addition, an article in the *Middle East Report Online* dated 28 April 2006 describes significant change in Egypt's media in the previous two year period, towards greater freedom of speech and wider comment on controversial issues, including Coptic claims of discrimination. It is argued in the article that the emergence of independent daily newspapers has contributed to an increased willingness to discuss sectarian strife and "the legitimacy of at least some Coptic demands".[20]

The most recent US Department of State report on human rights similarly observes that in 2009, despite the fact that "the government owned stock in three of the country's largest daily newspapers, which generally followed the government line, and…also controlled the licensing, printing, and distribution of newspapers, including independent papers and those of opposition political parties that frequently criticized the government and gave greater prominence to human rights abuses than did state-run newspapers"; some daily independent newspapers provided considerable coverage of controversial domestic topics. In addition, independent and opposition party-run newspapers that published articles which criticised the government did not face harassment or charges.[21]

5. **Where the Egyptian police had detained and questioned a Coptic Christian suspected of involvement in the kidnapping and conversion, would the police always proceed to charge the person with an offence (such as the offence of 'sectarian violence') or might the police release the person without charge due to lack of evidence?**

Although no reports of a Coptic Christian being detained on suspicion of involvement in the kidnapping of a Muslim were found among the sources consulted, the arrest of a Coptic Christian accused of assisting a Muslim to convert to Christianity is not uncommon, and, in a number of cases, those detained have been released without charge.

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[18] US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Egypt*, 26 October, Section II – Attachment 10

[19] 'Meca Coptic Activists Detained for Alleged Conversion Attempts' 2007, *The Daily News Egypt*, 11 November http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=10233 – Accessed 16 March 2010 – Attachment 11

[20] El Amrani, I. 2006, 'The Emergence of a Coptic Question in Egypt', *Middle East Report Online*, 28 April – Attachment 12

[21] US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Egypt*, 11 March, Section 2a – Attachment 13

In the case referred to in response to questions 3 and 4, where three Coptic Christians were detained in November 2007 being accused of "seeking to convert Muslims to Christianity", the article cited explains that the accused were "yet to be formally charged".[22] The US Commission on International Religious Freedom annual report for Egypt released on 1 May 2008 states that the three men "were detained after they were reportedly investigating the death of a Christian man allegedly killed by Egyptian police [and] were released without charge in late December".[23]

In addition, an Egyptian Muslim convert to Christianity, Mohammed Hegazy, was detained for three days and tortured by police following their discovery of his conversion. Hegazy "was harassed several more times, then in 2001 he published a book of poems critical of the security services. He was quickly arrested again and held for three months on suspicion of sedition, disturbing public order and insulting the president, though he was finally released without charge".[24] Another Muslim convert to Christianity, Baha Al-Accad, was also "detained in April 2005, acquitted by a court for "contempt of religion," subsequently released, detained again in 2006, and transferred to a prison in Wadi Natroun, where he was held for more than two years without charge. He was reportedly threatened by authorities upon his release [in April 2007]".[25]

A number of sources indicate that it is not uncommon for Coptic Christians to be arrested and detained without charge in connection with matters not related to conversion. For example, the US Department of State report on international religious freedom for 2009 describes the arrest and detention without charge of two Coptic Christians accused of involvement in the death of a Muslim villager following an assault on a monastery by a group of Muslim villagers in May 2008. The detained brothers, Refaat and Ibrahim Fawzy Abdo, remained in custody at the time the report was published in October 2009, despite a court order issued in December 2008 which called for their release. Reports argued that "the two brothers were being detained to pressure Coptic authorities not to press for official prosecution of the perpetrators" of the assault:

> Human rights advocates reported that this instance exemplifies an increasingly prevalent pattern of governmental authorities detaining Copts following sectarian attacks and either holding them without charges or threatening false charges and a police record; the detentions serve as a tool to blackmail Coptic authorities to desist from calling for official action to prosecute the perpetrators, and to dissuade the victims and/or their families from seeking recourse in the judicial system for restitution of damages.[26]

The most recent US DOS human rights report, released on 11 March 2010, explains that the two Coptic Christian brothers were released without charge on 20 August 2009 "after an agreement was reached in which the monastery dropped criminal charges against the attackers".[27]

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[22] 'Meca Coptic Activists Detained for Alleged Conversion Attempts' 2007, *The Daily News Egypt*, 11 November http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=10233 – Accessed 16 March 2010 – Attachment 11

[23] United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2008, *USCIRF Annual Report 2008 – Egypt*, 1 May, p. 246 – Attachment 14

[24] 'Egyptian Christian convert goes into hiding amid death threats' 2007, *Kuwait Times*, 11 August http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=MTAxNzY2OTk2MA== – Accessed 16 March 2010 – Attachment 15

[25] United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2008, *USCIRF Annual Report 2008 – Egypt*, 1 May, p. 246 – Attachment 14

[26] US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report 2009 – Egypt*, 26 October, Section II – Attachment 10

[27] US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Egypt*, 11 March, Section 2c – Attachment 13

According to the Assyrian International News Agency (AINA), "arresting Copts after every attack against Copts "is the usual scenario"". Discussing the arrest of Coptic Christian teenage boys following an attack on Mar Yohana (St. John's) Church in Nag Hammadi, Upper Egypt on 6 January, during which eight Christians and one Muslim were killed; AINA states that "[h]olding Christians from Nag Hammadi without charges…is the security services' "balancing act" to pressure the church to drop the charges against the Muslim perpetrators in exchange for setting the boys free. The arrests of the Coptic teenagers specifically was meant to pressure Bishop Kirollos into recanting his past statements on the role of State Security in the attacks".[28]

Similarly, a report of an attack on Coptic Christians in March 2010, which began "when Muslim residents threw stones at Christian construction workers they believed were building a church", cites a security official who stated that "at least 20 people from both sides were arrested for their involvement in [the] unrest".[29] In addition, a news article dated 20 August 2009 describes the arrest and detention without charge of two Coptic Christians when they reported to police that they had been attacked and beaten by a mob of Muslims. After filing a police report, the two men were arrested "on orders of Egypt's State Security Investigations, a political police force run by the Interior minister…for "security reasons," a euphemism commonly used under Egypt's longstanding Emergency Law [which] allows authorities to hold people without charge".[30]

**6. Please provide any further information on the attitude of Egyptian police, security forces, government informants and members of the Islamic brotherhoods towards Coptic Christians who are suspected of (i) assisting Christian converts and (ii) encouraging Muslims to convert.**

The US Department of State human rights report for Egypt released on 11 March 2010 explains that "[t]he government does not recognize…conversions of Muslim-born citizens to other religions…Government authorities detained and harassed some converts from Islam to Christianity and pressured them to revert to Islam…The government also reportedly maintained regular and sometimes hostile surveillance of Muslim-born citizens who were suspected of having converted to Christianity".[31]

Those who are perceived to be assisting Muslims to convert to Christianity also experience harassment by the Egyptian police and security forces. A September 2009 report by Christian Solidarity Worldwide cites documentation released by Freedom House, which indicates "that in 2003 alone, 22 Christians from Muslim backgrounds and those who assisted them [to convert to Christianity] were arrested".[32] In 2009, a Coptic priest was sentenced "to five years hard labor for officiating at a wedding between a Copt and a convert from Islam [Mariam Nabil] who allegedly presented false identification

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[28] McDonnell, F. J. H. 2010, 'Egypt's Christians In Peril', *Front Page Magazine*, 16 February http://frontpagemag.com/2010/02/16/egypt%E2%80%99s-christians-in-peril/ - Accessed 16 March 2010 – Attachment 16

[29] 'Dozens hurt in Egyptian clashes' 2010, *Aljazeera*, 13 March http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/03/2010313102416935717.html - Accessed 17 March 2010 – Attachment 17

[30] 'Two Copts in Egypt Imprisoned after Reporting Attack' 2009, *Compass Direct News*, 20 August http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/egypt/4818/ – Accessed 15 March 2010 – Attachment 18

[31] US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Egypt*, 11 March, Section 2c – Attachment 13

[32] Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) 2009, 'Egypt – Religious Freedom Profile', CSW website, 1 September, p. 9 http://www.online2.church123.com/attach.asp?clientURN=christiansolidarityworldwide2&attachFileName=5b3eb02f65359973d51d241e4abd0686.attach&attachOriginalFileName=CSW_Briefing_Egypt_September_2009.pdf – Accessed 12 March 2010 – Attachment 19

documentation".[33] The priest, along with "two other men were charged with converting Nabil and aiding her in forging a Christian ID card" despite her declaration of the priest's innocence on a television show. The priest "was convicted of this charge and sentenced to five years in Cairo's Tora prison".[34]

A 2009 article describes an incident where a well-known Muslim to Christian convert, Mohammed Hegazy, was arrested and tortured by the Egyptian authorities with the aim of forcing him to reveal the names of his "Christian contacts"; after he "took the unprecedented step of going to court to change his religion from Islam to Christianity on his national ID card" and was unsuccessful.[35] In 2007, Hegazy's lawyer submitted a statement claiming that due to death threats received by him from Egypt's secret police, he could no longer represent Hegazy in this matter.[36] In addition, two Christian rights workers, Adel Fawzy Faltas and Peter Ezzat, were detained following their organisation's involvement in a number of controversial cases, including Hegazy's. A high-profile interview with Hegazy conducted by Faltas led to accusations in the Egyptian media that he had encouraged the Muslim to convert to Christianity.[37] Faltas and Ezzat were detained and charged with "attacking Islam" and "denominational sedition" and "were found guilty of being partly responsible for the conversion of Mohamed Hegazy".[38]

The US Department of State report on religious freedom in Egypt for 2005 explains that a Coptic Christian policeman was arrested for referring a potential Muslim convert to a bishop and charged with "dereliction of duty and…bribing a Muslim to convert to Christianity". In July 2004, the policeman was sentenced by a military court to one year imprisonment in a military prison, however was released in January 2005.[39] A news article dated 3 November 2003 describes the arrest and torture of several converts from Islam to Christianity, including a husband and wife who were severely beaten and abused at the Al-Muski Police Department in Cairo, also claiming that "[a]dministrative officials who assisted the couple in securing new ID cards with Christian names were severely tortured by police".[40]

In addition, an undated overview of religious freedom in Egypt published by the Rutherford Institute describes the case of a Coptic University student, Amal Sobji Ayoub, who experienced ongoing harassment by security police since "her family befriended Christian converts from Islam" in 1992. The security police persuaded university professors to fail Ayoub in a number of subjects, and also had her fired from her employment. In addition, a Coptic Christian was arrested in July 1993 and denied release

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[33] US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Egypt*, 26 October, Introduction – Attachment 10

[34] 'Egyptian Convert Airs Declaration of Priest's Innocence' 2009, *Compass Direct News*, 22 May http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/egypt/3936/ – Accessed 15 March 2010 – Attachment 20

[35] 'Egypt's Christians face fresh attacks and legal battles' 2009, *Christian Today*, 10 July http://www.christiantoday.com/article/egypts.christians.face.fresh.attacks.and.legal.battles/23782.htm – Accessed 23 February 2010 – Attachment 21

[36] 'Egypt's secret service threatens Christian convert's lawyer' 2007, *BosNewsLife*, 10 August – Attachment 22

[37] 'Egypt: Government Extends Jail Time for Christian Rights Workers' 2007, *Compass Direct News*, 22 August http://archive.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&idelement=4999&lang=en&length=short&backpage=archives&critere=egypt%20copt%20arrest&countryname=&rowcur=0 – Accessed 15 March 2010 – Attachment 23

[38] Aid to the Church in Need 2008, 'Persecuted and Forgotten? A report on Christians oppressed for their Faith 2007/2008', 22 October, p. 37 – Attachment 24

[39] US Department of State 2005, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2005 - Egypt*, November, Section II – Attachment 25

[40] Ellis, M. 2003, 'Egypt arrests 22 Muslim converts to Christianity', *Come and See*, 3 November – Attachment 26

from prison in a Cairo court "after he was found carrying copies of the testimony of an Egyptian Muslim's conversion to Christianity".[41]

**Muslim Brotherhood**

Limited specific examples were found relating to the attitude of the Muslim Brotherhood towards Coptic Christians suspected of assisting Christian converts or encouraging Muslims to convert to Christianity. Nonetheless, based on the Muslim Brotherhood's view that all laws in Egypt should be based on Islamic (Shari'a) law[42], and that individuals who convert from Islam to another religion should be executed as apostates in accordance with Shari'a law,[43] it is likely that they would have a low level of tolerance of those who assist Muslims to convert to another religion.

Expert advice provided to the RRT on 26 February 2010 by Dr Paul Rowe of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights states that:

> Islamists frequently engage in vigilante attacks against Christians, in particular those who seek to share their faith with Muslim neighbours…[I]n May 2007, one Christian leader described to me in detail an incident in which one of his co-workers was abducted by a small group of self-appointed activists who were upset with his active attempts to evangelize Muslims.[44]

## Attachments


1. Rymarz, R. and de Souza, M. 2003, 'Maintaining Identity: An Examination of Coptic Orthodox Young Adults', Hartford Institute for Religion Research website, 15 August http://hirr.hartsem.edu/sociology/rymarz.html – Accessed 15 March 2010.

2. 'Deacons' (undated), Virgin Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church website http://www.virginmarybrisbane.org/services/deacons – Accessed 15 March 2010.

3. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2007, *DFAT Report No. 638 – Egypt: RRT Information Request: EGY31661*, 7 May.

4. 'The Coptic Orthodox Church' 2008, Saint Mary and Saint Antonios Coptic Orthodox Church website, 19 June http://www.copticchurch.org/node/94 - Accessed 15 March 2010.

5. Iskander, L. and Dunn, J. 2003, 'An Overview of the Coptic Christians of Egypt', Tour Egypt website http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/copticchristians.htm – Accessed 15 March 2010.

6. 'Coptic Orthodox Church' 2009, *BBC: Religions*, 25 June http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/coptic_1.shtml – Accessed 15 March 2010.

7. Dawood, K. R. B. 'The Coptic Calendar', The Heritage of The Coptic Orthodox Church website http://www.copticheritage.org/parameters/copticheritage/calendar/The_Coptic_Calendar.pdf - Accessed 17 March 2010.


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[41] The Rutherford Institute (undated), *Handbook on Religious Liberty Around the World: Egypt* http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/rihand/Egypt.html – Accessed 23 February 2010 – Attachment 27

[42] 'Ex-Muslims blocked from declaring conversion' 2008, *Compass News Direct*, 26 March – Attachment 28

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