

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Home > Research Program > Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

1 August 2013

EGY104502.E

Egypt: Situation of Jehovah's Witnesses, including treatment by society and the authorities and state protection available (2009-July 2013)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

The US Central Intelligence Agency *World Factbook* indicates that 90 percent of Egyptians are Muslim, 9 percent are Coptic, and 1 percent are "other Christian" (10 July 2013). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2012* says that there are 1,000 to 1,500 Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt (US 20 May 2013, 3).

Sources report that Jehovah's Witnesses were banned in Egypt in 1960 (European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses 26 Aug. 2009, 2; US Apr. 2013, 56). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2012* indicates that the government does not "recognize" Jehovah's Witnesses (US 20 May 2013, 3). Jehovah's Witnesses have attempted to gain legal recognition in court, but in December 2009, the Seventh Circuit Administrative Court denied their request for legal status (EIPR Jan. 2010, para.7; US Apr. 2013, 57) and they are appealing the verdict (*ibid.*). In 26 July 2013 correspondence with the Research Directorate, the General Counsel of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses in New York, "a central group of experienced elders who oversee the worldwide congregation" (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania n.d.), stated that Jehovah's Witnesses "do not have legal recognition to operate openly" (Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses 26 July 2013). According to the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), an "independent rights organization" established in Egypt in 2002 (n.d.), Notice no. 9/1985 issued on 21 August 1985 bans notaries from

... "taking any measure to notarize a marriage contract in which one or both spouses declare their Christian religion to be Jehovah's Witnesses. No measure may be taken to notarize signatures or dates on any documents issued by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Association, which is the Jehovah's Witnesses Association." (EIPR Jan. 2010, para. 7)

In their submission to the UN Human Rights Council for the 2010 Universal Periodic Review for Egypt, the European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses said that Jehovah's Witnesses may not obtain houses of worship in Egypt (26 Aug. 2009, 2). The US Commission on International Religious Freedom's *Annual Report 2013*, which covers the period from 31 January 2012 to 31 January 2013, explains that "Egyptian authorities continue to conduct surveillance and sometimes impede [Jehovah's Witnesses] private worship" (US Apr. 2013, 56). However, the report also indicates that the Egyptian government allows Jehovah's Witnesses to meet in private homes in groups of less than 30 people (*ibid.*), and the General Counsel of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses similarly said that these private gatherings are allowed with "30 or so" Witnesses (26 July 2013).

The EIPR indicated that, according to a 2009 press release by the National Council for Human Rights, Jehovah's Witnesses face "several problems in achieving acceptance, particularly among the Orthodox Church" (EIPR Jan. 2010, para. 43). A 2010 report by The Heritage Foundation, a think tank "whose mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense" (n.d.), also states that, in Egypt,

... leaders of the Orthodox Church have been willing to use the state's power to fight challenges from other Christian traditions. Historically, Protestant mainstream churches were viewed as the enemy. Currently, groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses, the Seventh Day Adventists, and the Mormons pose a threat to the traditional church. (9 Nov. 2010, 5-6)

The EIPR indicates Pope Shenouda, patriarch of the Holy See of St. Mark of Orthodox Copts, described Jehovah's Witnesses as a "set of heresies and perversions of the Book" (EIPR Jan. 2010, para. 7). The EIPR added that, according to members of the European delegation of the Jehovah's Witnesses, "members are considered Zionists and violators of human rights principles, which has obstructed the exercise of their basic rights" (*ibid.*).

The General Counsel of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses stated that "the current situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt is stable" (Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses 26 July 2013). He added that, in the past, Jehovah's Witnesses have been subject to "beatings and torture as recently as five to seven years ago, loss of employment, threats and harassment, deportations, and other difficulties at the hands of authorities" (*ibid.*). However, he

said that "there have been no recent incidents of violence against Witnesses since the time of the revolution" (ibid.). The General Counsel of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses further explained that, in his view, the military "has had no issue with Jehovah's Witnesses it has been the way in Egypt for many years that the police closely scrutinize most any group of people, but their monitoring of Witnesses is now unthreatening" (26 July 2013). Corroboration could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR). January 2010. "Freedom of Religion and Belief in Egypt." Quarterly Report (October-December 2009). <<http://eipr.org/en/report/2010/01/01/935>> [Accessed 24 July 2013]

_____. N.d. "Who We Are." <<http://eipr.org/en/page/who-we-are>> [Accessed 29 July 2013]

European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses. 26 August 2009. Marcel Gillet. "Egypt." <http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session7/EG/EAJCW_UPR_EGY_S07_2010_TheEuropeanAssociationofJehovahsChristianWitnesses.pdf> [Accessed 12 July 2013]

Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses. 26 July 2013. Correspondence from the General Counsel to the Research Directorate.

The Heritage Foundation. 9 November 2010. Samuel Tadros. "Religious Freedom in Egypt." Backgrounder No. 2487. <http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2010/pdf/bg2487.pdf> [Accessed 12 July 2013]

_____. N.d. "About Heritage." <<http://www.heritage.org/about>> [Accessed 29 July 2013]

United States (US). 10 July 2013. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). "Egypt." *The World Factbook*. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html>> [Accessed 12 July 2013]

_____. 20 May 2013. Department of State. "Egypt." *International Religious Freedom Report for 2012*. <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/208598.pdf>> [Accessed 24 July 2013]

_____. April 2013. US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). "Egypt." *Annual Report 2013*. <[http://www.uscirf.gov/images/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/images/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf)> [Accessed 24 July 2013]

Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. N.d. "How Jehovah's Witnesses Are Organized." <<http://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/require/how-jehovahs-witnesses-are-organized>> [Accessed 30 July 2013]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact the following individuals and representatives were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights; Egyptian Organization for Human Rights; Evangelical Asian Church in Toronto; St. Mary and St. Antonios Coptic Church in New York; St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church in Ottawa. The following individuals could not provide information for this Response: Associate Professor of History, Simon Fraser University; Director, Centre for Critical Development Studies, University of Toronto; Professor of Islamic Studies, Emory University.

Internet sites, including: Ahram Online; Al-Arham Weekly; Amnesty International; Association internationale pour la défense de la liberté religieuse; British Broadcasting Corporation; Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; *Courrier international*; Daily Egypt News; ecoi.net; Egypt Independent; Egyptian Organization for Human Rights; Factiva; Human Rights First; Human Rights Watch; International Crisis Group; International Federation of Human Rights; Middle East Media Research Institute; Minority Rights Group International; *Le Monde*; National Council for Human Rights; Observatoire Pharos; Pew Research Center; Think Africa Press; United Nations – Integrated Regional Information Networks, Refworld.

[Click here for tips on how to use this search engine.](#)

Date modified: 2013-07-17 [Top of Page](#)

The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.