

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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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.

27 November 2013

EGY104664.E

Egypt: Whether people who have converted from Islam to Christianity, particularly those converts who have been arrested, are able to obtain passports and leave the country (April 2010-November 2013)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Treatment of Individuals who have Converted from Islam to Christianity

In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, an independent journalist and publisher, who is also an activist for democracy and has previously served as the chairperson for the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR), an NGO dedicated to monitoring human rights in the country (EOHR n.d.), stated that

[c]onverting to Christianity, or better still converting from Islam, is technically not possible. While the laws do not forbid or criminalize it in any way, there is no legal venue for doing so. If an Egyptian Moslem converts to any other religion and tries to register the conversion, he will simply be denied that by any government official. It normally is left at that and no legal charges are made. (Independent Journalist 10 Nov. 2013)

However, in correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, an associate professor of political and international studies at Trinity Western University who has researched Christian minorities in the Middle East for almost two decades, stated that "a convert to Christianity from Islam will have extreme difficulty dealing with officials and neighbours who have any idea of his or her decision" (Associate Professor 8 Nov. 2013). The Associate Professor added that "Muslim converts to Christianity are regularly harassed by government officials who view their actions as a social offence against Islam tantamount to treason" (Associate Professor 8 Nov. 2013).

Similarly, in correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, a board member of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Canada stated that authorities will attempt to dissuade someone from converting from Islam to Christianity and may arbitrarily imprison the person alongside "dangerous criminals" if they insist on converting (Coptic Orthodox Church of Canada 13 Nov. 2013). A report from Amnesty International (AI) states that under the country's emergency law, in force since the 1981 assassination of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, there was a system of administrative detention allowing for the detention of individuals "without charge or trial" (AI 2011, 1-2). The report indicates that such administrative detainees could include religious minorities, (ibid., 3-4) and "sometimes converts from Islam to Christianity" (ibid., 29). The state of emergency expired in May 2012 and was not renewed, marking the first time in 31 years that it was not in effect (AI 2013; Human Rights Watch Jan. 2013, 4). According to Human Rights Watch, "by the end of August [2012], the Ministry of the Interior had released all those detained under the administrative detention provisions of the emergency law" (ibid.).

2. Obtaining Passports

The independent journalist stated that a convert from Islam to Christianity attempting to obtain a passport "should not have a problem as Egyptian passports do not state the person's religion in the data page" (Independent Journalist 10 Nov. 2013). He added that a convert was not legally barred from receiving a card but that "if [the convert] tries to get an identification card he will be given one stating that he is a Moslem" (ibid.). The Coptic Orthodox Church of Canada board member likewise indicated that a convert from Islam to Christianity would not be able to obtain an ID card indicating the convert's new religious status (13 Nov. 2013).

Several sources also state that Egyptian ID cards indicate religious affiliation (NPR 27 Apr. 2013; *The New York Times* 15 Apr. 2013; Church in Chains 22 Oct. 2013) Sources also state that it is impossible for a person who has converted from Islam to Christianity to have their religious status changed on their ID card (ibid.; MNN 18 Jan. 2013; Compass Direct News 22 Apr. 2011).

The board member of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Canada stated that it is not possible to obtain a passport without an ID card (14 Nov. 2013). Other sources note that an ID card is needed for many aspects of life such as:

- opening a bank account (MNN 18 Jan. 2013; Compass Direct News 22 Apr. 2011),
- getting married (Church in Chains 22 Oct. 2013; Compass Direct News 22 Apr. 2011), and
- travelling (Church in Chains 22 Oct. 2013; MNN 18 Jan. 2013).

Sources also indicate that the religion listed on the card determines whether the holder is subject to Islamic Law (Compass Direct News 22 Apr. 2013; MNN 18 Jan. 2013).

The Associate Professor stated that converts from Islam to Christianity continue to have problems "despite court rulings that have allowed such a person to change his or her religion on identity cards," adding that these issues "have survived changes in government since the 2011 uprising" (Associate Professor 8 Nov. 2013). He also stated that "the difficulty of individuals seeking a religion change on their government-issued identity card is well-documented" and that "[t]his would extend also to having new identity documents issued by the government, including a passport" (ibid.). According to the Associate Professor, "difficulties would include extensive questioning, arbitrary arrest and detention, harassment, and confiscation of identity documents required for the passport" (ibid.). The Associate Professor also offered the view that "it would be the exceptional case in which a Muslim convert to Christianity would not have difficulties getting official documents" (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

The independent journalist stated that there have been cases in which persons who are attempting to change the religious status on their ID card or obtain passports "have been harassed by Security Services," but added that this was done in an "extralegal manner" (Independent Journalist 10 Nov. 2013).

3. Difficulties in Leaving the Country

The Associate Professor stated that Muslim converts to Christianity seeking to leave the country "are regularly detained and mistreated in an attempt to make their decision [to leave] a difficult one" (8 Nov. 2013). Corroborating information for this statement could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Media sources report on the case of a father who had converted to Christianity from Islam who faced mistreatment when attempting to leave the country with his daughter (Compass Direct News 22 Apr. 2011; Porte Ouvertes 30 mars 2011). The father wanted to bring the daughter out of the country as it was not possible to change his ID card (ibid.; Compass Direct News 22 Apr. 2011). According to news agency Compass Direct News, the two had to obtain a court order granting them permission to leave the country (ibid.).

4. Impact of Previous Arrests

According to AI, former administrative detainees may face restrictions on their freedom of movement such as by being denied passports or by being forced to obtain permission from the State Security Investigations service (SSI) officer responsible for their case before travelling within or outside Egypt (2011, 19).

The independent journalist indicated that "a previous arrest or incarceration record could make it difficult to get a passport for a number of years" (10 Nov. 2013). According to the Associate Professor, "[a] previous arrest record would certainly bring attention to such an individual, which would at the least delay their departure from the country," adding that

Such a record would also motivate an in-depth investigation of that individual's background, revealing information such as their desire to convert to Christianity from Islam. I would expect this to add to any difficulties the individual would have in obtaining a passport or in leaving the country. (Associate Professor 8 Nov. 2013).

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

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Porte Ouvertes. 30 March 2011. "Egypte: Maher El-Gohary et sa fille réfugiés en Syrie." <<http://www.portesouvertes.fr/informer/lettres-de-nouvelles/filrouge/2011/mars/Egypte-Maher-El-Gohary-et-sa-fille-refugies-en-Syrie/>> [Accessed 26 Nov. 2013]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: An emeritus professor in the Department of Religion at Emory University in Atlanta was unable to provide information for this Response. An associate professor of Islamic studies at Virginia Tech did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response. Attempts to contact the following individuals and organizations were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Associate Professor, University of Guelph; Egyptian American Rule of Law Association; Egyptian Organization for Human Rights; legal advisor with the North Africa Litigation Initiative at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.

Internet Sites, including: Al Arabyia; Al Monitor; Australia – Refugee Review Tribunal; Christian Solidarity Worldwide; The Center for Intercultural Dialogue and Translations Daily News; ecoi.net; Egypt – Egyptian Government Services Portal, Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt in Washington DC, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Factiva; France24; International Crisis Group; Minority Rights Group International; Pew Research Center; UN – Refworld; US – Department of State.

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