



EGYPT

Overview

- At slightly more than 99 million, Egypt's population is estimated to be growing at more than one million annually.
- Most Egyptians are Sunni Muslim, with Christians estimated to be around 8-10% of the population (though some church sources give higher estimates).

Christian Communities

The Coptic Orthodox church is the largest Christian community. Other registered churches include the Greek Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic churches, the Chaldean, Maronite, Melkite, Armenian, Coptic, Roman and Syrian Catholic churches, the Anglican church and 16 other Protestant denominations of which the Presbyterian church is the largest.

Christians have traditionally enjoyed good standing in society, with guaranteed representation in Parliament. However, restrictions apply to recognised Christian communities, especially to activities that could be construed as proselytism.

Christian communities have enjoyed a greater degree of protection under President al-Sisi, who has repaired churches damaged in the 2013 violence which followed the overthrow of then president Morsi.

Legal Context

Egypt's 2014 constitution establishes Islam as the State religion and the principles of Islamic law as the main source of legislation, also providing that Christians and Jews may govern personal status and religious affairs according to their own codes. The constitution affirms the principle of non-discrimination, including on the basis of religion. It states that freedom of religion is absolute and guarantees freedom of religious practice in accordance with regulations, though this right is limited to adherents of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). Although religious conversion is not prohibited in codified legislation, conversion away from

Islam is not allowed in practice. Egypt ratified international treaties with a reservation against articles that violate Islamic law.

In late August 2016 Egypt's House of Representatives passed Law 80/2016 on the construction of churches. The law aims to make obtaining a permit for such construction easier. Since then the president has given permission for several new church buildings, but no new churches have obtained a permit by following the procedures of this new law. In addition, more than 1,000 previously illegal church buildings have been licensed since the 2016 law came into effect.

Pressure Points

More than 100 Christians have been killed by extremists since January 2017, including several attacks on church services. Seven Christians were killed in Northern Sinai province in early 2017, prompting hundreds of Christian families to flee that governorate.

There continue to be incidents of sectarian violence, especially in Upper-Egypt, where Christians and their properties are attacked, usually after rumours that a building is being converted into a church or of a romantic relationship between a Christian man and a Muslim woman.

There is strong family and societal pressure against those who choose to leave Islam. In some instances, they can face violent responses from family members.

Case Studies

On 7 January 2019, a midnight mass was held at a small unlicensed church in Manshiyet Zaafarana village, Minya province. A few hours after the service, Muslims tried to break into the building but were rebuffed by guards. Two priests decided to stay in the church in case the Muslims returned. On 11 January the building was threatened by a large mob of Muslims. The police came and forcibly evicted the priests from the church and closed the church building.

On 12 April 2019, a mob of angry Muslims attacked a church in the village of Nagaa Halaf Allah, Sohag province. One of the priests sustained minor head injuries and another Copt was also injured. When the police attended, they escorted the priests safely out of the village, but closed the building and banned any worship, day-care or Sunday school till further notice.

From the Jan – Jun 2019 Periodic Report the following cases can be mentioned here: Egy 1, 8 12, 14.

Quotes

As we farewell those who have departed, we do so in the spirit of hope and the resurrection that awaits us; as we comfort those injured and grieving, we do so in the

spirit of confidence in God's healing hand; and as we consider the effect this attack has on us all as Coptic Orthodox Christians, we do so in the spirit of the love and empowering grace that we are all called to live.

(His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London, following the murder of seven, and the wounding of at least a dozen others, outside a monastery in Upper Egypt)

Prayer Points

Please pray for:

- God's comfort for those who lost loved ones and for full recovery of the injured
- Comfort and encouragement for the wider Christian community and for God's protection over his church in Egypt and over other targets of religiously motivated attacks
- That the perpetrators of violent attacks and the instigators behind them will be brought to justice
- Protection for Christians and others threatened by militants, and for wisdom as to how to respond to these threats.
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