

## EGYPT

Charges of blasphemy and contempt of religion have been used in Egypt to criminalize the freedom of thought: the right to have doubts about some religious teachings, to express them publicly and to share them with others.

From 2011 to 2013, courts convicted twenty-seven of forty-two defendants on charges of contempt for religion, according to the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR). Judges acquitted three defendants and rejected charges against eleven others for lack of standing.

In March 2014, the Interior Ministry official in charge of security in Alexandria said he would form a task force to arrest atheists. In June 2014, following the election of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Egypt's youth and religious endowments ministries announced a joint campaign to confront the spread of atheism.

A few months later Al-Shabab, a government-linked newspaper, stated that atheists were "the country's second enemy after the Muslim Brotherhood" and quoted a psychologist saying that "atheism leads to mental imbalances and paranoia".

On 10<sup>th</sup> December 2014, the Dar al-Ifta, a Justice Ministry wing that issues religious edicts, released a survey claiming that Egypt was home to 866 atheists, the highest number of any country in the Middle East. Two aides to the Grand Mufti – the head of the Dar al-Ifta – described the supposed increase in atheism as "a dangerous development" that "should ring alarm bells," *Mada Masr* reported.

In December 2017, the Committee on Religion in the Egyptian Parliament disclosed plans to pass into law, a bill that makes atheism a criminal offence.

Current Egyptian law says atheists can be prosecuted for expressing their disbelief in public but the committee's proposal would go further and criminalize disbelief itself.

### Coptic Orthodox

#### **Kirollos Shawki ATALLAH**

**Age:** 19 years

**Date and place of arrest:** In November 2014, at a café in the Beheira governorate

**Charges:** Posting photos on Facebook deemed defamatory to Islam

**First court decision:** On 17<sup>th</sup> June 2014

**Last court decision:** On 10<sup>th</sup> January 2015, he was sentenced to three years in prison by a minor offenses court.

*Source:* <http://www.releaseinternational.org/egypt-christian-gets-6-year-jail-term-for-liking-facebook-page/>

## **Makram DIAB**

**Age:** 49 years

**Date and place of arrest:** In February 2012

**Charges:** Insulting the Prophet and provoking students

**Statement of the defendant:** He claims he told a Salafi Muslim that Muhammad had more than four wives, which resulted in an argument.

**Article of the criminal/ civil/ administrative code:** Article 98 of the Egyptian Penal Code, which prescribes a sentence of six months to five years and a fine of 500 to 1,000 Egyptian pounds for anyone who uses religion to propagate 'extremist ideas' to incite strife, insult a monotheistic religion, or damage national unity.

**First court decision:** On 29<sup>th</sup> February 2012 he was sentenced to six years in prison.

**Last court decision:** On 16<sup>th</sup> March and 4<sup>th</sup> April 2012, two appeals were rejected.

**Place of detention:** Assiut General Prison

**Other information:** The first trial lasted only ten minutes and no defense attorney was present. The first appeal process triggered a massive riot by Muslim attorneys. The judge doubled the sentence to appease an angry mob, 2,500 strong, which had surrounded the courtroom demanding Diab's death.

*Source:* [https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2012/04-April/article\\_1497614.html/](https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2012/04-April/article_1497614.html/)

<http://www.investigativeproject.org/4034/arab-spring-egypt-legal-persecution-of-christians>

## **Sunni**

### **Mohamed ABDULLAH AL-NASR**

**Date and place of arrest:** February 2017

**Charges:** He was charged for contempt of religion.

**Article of the civil/criminal/administrative code:** Article 98 (F) of the Egyptian Penal Code.

**First court decision:** In February 2017, he was sentenced to five years in prison for questioning various interpretations of Qur'anic texts on Facebook.

**Other information:** In November 2016, al-Nasr also had claimed to be the Mahdi, a promised eschatological figure within Islam, prompting calls for his prosecution and a psychiatric evaluation. He reportedly began a hunger strike February 26, 2017 to protest his imprisonment.

*Source:* <http://bit.ly/2zXgH8L>

## **Shia Muslim**

### **Amr ABDALLAH**

**Date and place of arrest:** On 14<sup>th</sup> November 2013

**Charges:** Blasphemy and defamation of the Prophet Muhammad's companions

**Article of the criminal/ civil/ administrative code:** Article 98 of the Egyptian Penal Code (Prescribes a sentence of six months to five years and a fine of 500 to 1,000 Egyptian pounds [approximately €25 to €50 Euro] for anyone who uses religion to propagate 'extremist ideas' to incite strife, insult a monotheistic religion, or damage national unity)

**Last court decision:** On 26<sup>th</sup> February 2014 he was sentenced to five years in prison by the Gamaliya Misdemeanor Court.

**Other information:** Amr Abdallah, was forcibly removed from al-Hussein Mosque in Cairo while trying to celebrate the Shiite holiday of Ashoura. The case was highly criticized by rights group.

Source: <https://timep.org/commentary/blasphemy-intolerance-in-egypt/>

## **Atheists**

### **Mustafa ABDEL-NABI**

**Date and place of arrest:** January 2016

**Charges:** He was charged for blasphemy.

**Article of the criminal/administrative/civil code:** Article 98 (F) of the Egyptian Penal Code, contempt for religion.

**First court decision:** In January 2016, online activist Mustafa ABDEL-NABI was convicted in absentia to three years in prison for blasphemy for postings about atheism on his Facebook page.

**Second court decision:** His appeal was upheld on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016 by the Edku Misdemeanor Court.

Source: <http://bit.ly/2zXgH8L>

### **Karam SABER**

**Charges:** Insulting the divine, writing short stories which call for atheism, defame divinity, incite strife and spill of blood

**Statement of the defendant:** He claims that: “[In the stories], I expose the fake religious discourse and detect the scale of contradictions in a patriarchal society that claims religiousness while it practices the opposite, especially in terms of oppressing women. I pose simple questions that seek God amid all this absurdity we are living in”.

**Article of the criminal/ civil/ administrative code:** Article 98 of the Egyptian Penal Code (Prescribes a sentence of six months to five years and a fine of 500 to 1,000 Egyptian pounds [approximately €25 to €50 Euro] for anyone who uses religion to propagate ‘extremist ideas’ to incite strife, insult a monotheistic religion, or damage national unity)

**First court decision:** On 7<sup>th</sup> May 2013, he was sentenced in absentia to five years imprisonment and a fine of 1,000 Egyptian pounds [approximately €50 Euro] by a criminal court in Beba.

**Last court decision:** On 5<sup>th</sup> June 2014, his five year sentence and conviction was upheld by the court of appeals in Beba.

**Other information:**

*Source:* <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/06/04/egypt-repeal-laws-used-convict-author>  
<http://www.cihrs.org/?p=6825&lang=en>