

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.

Article 98(f) of the Egyptian Penal Code prohibits citizens from “ridiculing or insulting heavenly religions or inciting sectarian strife” and is used in all the cases of freedom of thought and expression related to religious issues. Authorities use this “contempt-of-religion,” or blasphemy, law to detain, prosecute, and imprison atheists and members of religious groups whose practices deviate from mainstream Islamic beliefs or whose activities are alleged to jeopardize “communal harmony” or insult Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. In January 2015, President al-Sissi issued a decree that permits the government to ban any foreign publications it deems offensive to religion.

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.

Atheists are one of Egypt's least-protected minorities, although the constitution ostensibly guarantees freedom of belief and expression.

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, the Ministries of Religious Endowments and Sports and Youth initiated a national campaign to combat the spread of atheism among Egyptian youth.

On 10th 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.

Five unnamed Coptic Catholics

Date of arrest: On 22nd August 2018 at the Virgin Mary and St Mahrael church in Luxor Governorate

Charges: Worshipping without a permit

First court decision: 15 days detention

Last court decision: On 5th September they were ordered 15 more days in prison

Other information: They had been worshipping at the site for eighteen years. This is the third church to be closed in Luxor.

Source: <https://bit.ly/2MN3UbZ>

Coptic Christian

Abdo ADEL

Age: 43 years

Place of residence: Menbal, Minya governorate

Date and place of arrest: On the 6th of July 2018

Charges: “Insulting Islam in the first degree” for publishing a post on Facebook that insulted Islam, by comparing the prophet Muhammad with Jesus.

First court decision: He was sentenced to three years in prison

Last court decision: Mr. Adel has appealed and the hearing is scheduled for the end of December 2018.

Other information: Following Abdo Adel’s arrest, a mob attacked houses owned by Copts and the situation remained tense as of December 2018.

Sources: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/12/%C2%AD%C2%AD%C2%ADegypt-copt-sentenced-to-three-years-in-prison-for-blasphemous-facebook-post/>,

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/07/egypt-copts-attacked-after-facebook-post-showing-contempt-of-islam/>

Coptic Orthodox

Makram DIAB

Age: 54 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 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 29th February 2012 he was sentenced to six years in prison.

Last court decision: On 16th March and 4th April 2012, two appeals were rejected.

Place of detention: Assiut General Prison

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

Source: https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2012/04-April/article_1497614.html/
<http://www.investigativeproject.org/4034/arab-spring-egypt-legal-persecution-of-christians>

Sunni Muslim

Mohamed ABDULLAH AL-NASR

Date and place of arrest: February 2017

Charges: He was charged for contempt of religion.

Article of the criminal code: Article 98 (F)

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, Mohamed Abdallah Nasr also had claimed to be the Mahdi (Redeemer), a promised eschatological figure within Islam, prompting calls for his prosecution and a psychiatric evaluation.

Mohamed Abdallah Nasr was known for being the Imam of Tahrir Square Friday prayers during the Egyptian Revolution. He rose to popularity after inspiring the start of what is popularly referred to as ‘The Islamic Enlightenment Movement’. Sheikh Nasr, who is a graduate of Al-Azhar, is well known for his criticism of the curriculum currently taught by Al-Azhar and their refusal to heed President Sisi’s call for reforming the way sheikhs teach religion in Egypt. He claimed that the amputation of hands is not a valid Islamic punishment. Mohamed Nasr may have been arrested and sentenced to prison for his views.

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

<https://bit.ly/2zFwQiL>

Shia Muslim

Amr ABDALLAH

Date and place of arrest: On 14th November 2013

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

Article of the criminal 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 [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 26th 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 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.

Last court decision: His appeal was upheld on 23rd February 2016 by the Edku Misdemeanor Court.

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

Kirollos Shawki ATALLAH

Age: 22 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 17th June 2014, he was sentenced to six years in prison.

Last court decision: On 10th January 2015, his sentenced was reduced 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/>

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 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 [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 7th 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 5th 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>