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Mobs attack Christians' homes, businesses after church's legal recognition

By Anugrah Kumar

The Christian Post (16.07.2022)- <https://bit.ly/3v5VIwC> - Outraged over the newly received formal legal recognition of a church in Egypt, Muslims in large crowds attacked and damaged the homes, shops and vehicles of many area Coptic Christians, according to a persecution watchdog.

The U.S.-based group, [International Christian Concern](#), reported this week that Muslim mobs vandalized properties of Christians surrounding the Church of Michael the Archangel.

In the June 23 violence, Muslim mobs hurled rocks through the windows of homes and set fire to buildings and vehicles despite the presence of security personnel deployed in the area to protect the church, ICC said.

The local Christians had been waiting for years for the legal approval of the church, which was originally built in 2003.

"Throughout the process, Muslims in the area have rejected the legitimacy of the new church, asserting that the construction or restoration of a church contradicts Islamic law.

The *Conditions of Omar*, thought to have been written by Caliph Omar I, is one Islamic text that they refer to. The text dictates that no churches should ever be built or repaired, and that Christians must make do with pre-existing churches only," ICC said.

The Committee for the Legalization of Unlicensed Churches, which was formed in January 2017 comprising the ministers of justice, parliamentary affairs, and local development and housing, as well as representatives of local authorities and Christian communities, has [legalized](#) more than 1,600 churches in the Muslim-majority country.

However, opposition to churches by local Muslims remains.

The Copts, who make up about 10% of Egypt's population, are the descendants of a long line of ancient Egyptians who later converted to Christianity in the early first century, [according to Encyclopedia Britannica](#).

According to the persecution watchdog group Open Doors USA, Egypt is among the 20 worst persecutors of Christians in the world.

Incidents of Christian persecution in Egypt vary from Christian women being harassed while walking in the street to Christian communities being driven out of their homes by extremist mobs, the group [says](#) on its website, adding that Christians are typically treated as second-class citizens.

Egypt's government speaks positively about the Egyptian Christian community. Still, the lack of serious law enforcement and the unwillingness of local authorities to protect Christians leave them vulnerable to all kinds of attacks, especially in Upper Egypt, it explains.

"Due to the dictatorial nature of the regime, neither church leaders nor other Christians are in a position to speak out against these practices."

Churches and Christian nongovernmental organizations are restricted in their ability to build new churches or run social services, it adds.

"The difficulties come both from state restrictions, as well as from communal hostility and mob violence."

Photo: Reuters/Amr Abdallah Dalsh

A Yemeni convert to Christianity under threat of deportation

The Egyptian initiative warns against deporting a Yemeni asylum seeker to his country because of his declaration of his conversion to Christianity, and expresses its fears that he will be in grave danger

EIPR (23.06.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3bETqO3> - The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) warns of the imminent forcible deportation of Yemeni asylum-seeker Abdul-Baqi Saeed Abdo, who is in pretrial detention pending Supreme State Security case No. 2993 of 2021, on charges of: "joining a terrorist group with knowledge of its purposes, and contempt of the Islamic religion." This arrest and imprisonment come against the backdrop of Abdel-Baqi's announcement on social media of his conversion to Christianity, which took place in 2013, before his arrival to Egypt.

Security forces had arrested Abdul-Baqi Saeed, 52 years, from his home in the Faisal area on December 15, 2021, at 2:00 A. M., after searching his home and seizing three

laptops. He was then referred to the Supreme State Security Prosecution, which investigated him on December 23, after he was detained for eight days.

Abdul-Baqi Saeed had obtained an asylum application registration card from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees No. 55-15C04744, on June 29, 2015, the date of his registration at the office, and he was issued a card, still in his possession, on January 22, 2020.

EIPR said that Egypt is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which prohibits the forcible expulsion or return of refugees in accordance with Article 33, which states that "no state party may expel or return a refugee in any way to the borders of the regions where his life or freedom would be threatened because of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinions."

The principle of non-refoulement under international law also ensures that no one is to be returned to a country where they would be at risk of persecution, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or other irreparable harm.

EIPR anticipates the grave danger if the deportation of Abdel-Baqi Saeed Abdo to Yemen is carried out, considering the unknown fate awaiting him there. Saeed came to Egypt seeking asylum after being subjected to an attempted murder in his country, from which he escaped, and after the actual murder of his wife, following his and his family's conversion to Christianity.

This comes after a group of Special Rapporteurs condemned, last April, the mass deportations and expulsions of refugees from Eritrea, in violation of Egypt's international obligations in "international human rights law" and the Egyptian Constitution itself, which stipulates in Article 91 that "the state grants political asylum to every foreigner who has been persecuted for defending peoples' interests, human rights, peace, or justice. The extradition of political refugees is prohibited, all according to the law."

EIPR calls on the Egyptian authorities to stop the process of deporting Abdel-Baqi Saeed and calls for his release and dropping of all charges against him.

Photo : shutterstock.com – 393595171

9 Copts imprisoned for demonstrating for the reconstruction of their church

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (13.04.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3jJAK0d> - Sunday, March 13, 2022, the Supreme State Security Prosecution decided to renew the detention of nine Copts for a period of fifteen days, pending investigations in Supreme State Security Prosecution Case No. 65 of 2022. This comes against the backdrop of dozens of residents of Ezbet Faragallah, affiliated to Samalut district, north of Minya governorate, demonstrating on January 22 at the headquarters of the Diocese of Samalut, and organizing a protest sit-in in Ezbet the next day to demand the re-establishment of St. Joseph and Abu Sefein Church in Ezbet.

On January 30, 2022, security forces in Minya Governorate arrested Mounir Samir Mounir, Raymond Mamdouh William, Jaid Saad Zekry, Milad Mahrous Tawfiq, Abanoub Magdy Semaan, Gerges Samir Gerges, Shenouda Salib Hosni, Mina Salib Hosni, and Milad Reda Tawfiq Ayyad.

After the arrest of those nine, they were taken to the headquarters of the National Security Apparatus in Minya Governorate, and then sent for interrogation at the Supreme State Security Prosecution on February 2 and 3, 2022, pending State Security Prosecution case 65 of 2022. They were charged with participating in an assembly that endangers public peace and committing a terrorist act with the aim of disturbing public security. Meanwhile, the accusation of "arranging a gathering that affects public authority" was added to Munir Samir Munir, known as Marco Samir. The State Security Prosecution decided to imprison the defendants for 15 days pending investigations, then renewed the detention decision on paper on February 12, 2022 without presenting them in person to the prosecution to hear their statements nor in the presence of their lawyers.

The church, which is the only facility in the village where religious services are held, was issued an official demolition decision, which was implemented in July 2021. The church building was completely destroyed in 2016 after a fire broke out, and the investigation authorities have not announced the cause of the fire until now. Some of the people of the hamlet attributed the fire, which led to the cessation of religious prayers since that date, to what they described as a "deliberate act."

On May 4, 2021, the Official Gazette published Prime Minister Decision No. 16 of 2021 to regularize the status of 82 churches and affiliated buildings. The eighth article of the decision stipulated: "The decision of the Dilapidated Facilities Committee in Minya Governorate to demolish the building of the Church of Saint Joseph and Abu Sefein in Ezbet Faraj Allah, Samalut, Minya, is implemented up to the ground level, provided that legal measures are taken." Subsequently, the church applied for a demolition permit from Minya Governorate, which was approved by License No. (102202-200021) for the year 2021 for the entire area of the church of 800 square meters, and it was implemented in July 2021. Then the church submitted a request for reconstruction, and it did not receive any responses from administrative and security authorities, and in violation of the Church Building Law No. 60 of 2016, which specified a four-month period to respond to requests submitted to it.

The official in charge of the freedom of religion and belief file at EIPR said, "Instead of arresting a number of residents of the estate, official and security authorities should have responded promptly to their demands and issued a decision to rebuild the church for which an official demolition decision was issued by the Prime Minister, especially since the villagers took the legal path. They also submitted the church documents to the responsible authorities, and the demolition was carried out with official approvals".

EIPR demanded the release of the nine Copts in the village of Ezbet Faraj Allah, and the dropping of all charges against them, along with the speedy issuance of the decision to rebuild the church that was demolished.

For more [details](#).

Photo: eipr.org

Reda Abdel Rahman: Abuse of state custody in a case of freedom of religious thought and expression

USCIRF Commissioner Sharon Kleinbaum Advocates for Egyptian Reda Abdel Rahman through Religious Prisoners of Conscience Project

USCIRF (10.02.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3Jj42xq> - U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Commissioner [Sharon Kleinbaum](#) today announced her adoption of [Reda Abdel Rahman](#) through USCIRF's [Religious Prisoners of Conscience \(RPOC\) Project](#). Abdel Rahman, a member of Egypt's Qur'anist Muslim community, has been in state custody since August 2020.

"Abdel Rahman is being held simply for being a member of Egypt's Qur'anist community and peacefully expressing his religious beliefs. Not only has he been unjustly detained on unsubstantiated terrorism allegations, but prison authorities have also mistreated Abdel Rahman, denying him vitally necessary medical care," said USCIRF Commissioner Kleinbaum. *"Authorities should stop harassing the Qur'anist community and immediately release Abdel Rahman so he can receive proper medical care."*

[Qur'anists](#) in Egypt are a Muslim minority that view the Qur'an as the only legitimate source of authority for religious rulings and reject the authenticity and authority of the Hadith, the sayings and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. These beliefs, which Egyptian authorities view as a deviation from mainstream Sunni Muslim interpretations, have made Qur'anists a longstanding and repeated target of Egyptian officials.

Egyptian security forces detained Abdel Rahman and several of his family members in August 2020, questioning him about his religious beliefs and his relationship with his uncle, Qur'anist scholar and former USCIRF fellow Dr. Ahmed Sobhy Mansour. Egyptian authorities released Abdel Rahman's relatives after a few days, but Abdel Rahman remained forcibly disappeared for more than 40 days. In October 2020, he appeared in front of state prosecution and was falsely accused of joining ISIS and promoting religious extremism. He is currently being held in pre-trial detention, which the court continues to renew in multiple, successive 45-day increments.

"USCIRF commends the Egyptian government's recent release of [Christians Patrick Zaki](#) and [Ramy Kamel](#), but other religious prisoners of conscience such as Reda Abdel Rahman remain in prison. Egypt should continue on this path by releasing Abdel Rahman and dropping all charges," USCIRF Commissioner Kleinbaum added.

The cousin of Reda Abdel Rahman, Sherif Mansour, joined us on an episode of the USCIRF Spotlight [podcast](#) to highlight the case of Abdel Rahman. In its [2021 Annual Report](#), USCIRF continued to recommend that the U.S. Department of State place [Egypt](#) on its Special Watch List for engaging in severe violations of international religious freedom. USCIRF's November 2021 [Egypt Country Update](#) notes Egypt's incremental steps toward improving religious freedom, but also highlights the need to improve conditions for religious minorities, which in addition to members of the Qur'anist community include Coptic Christians, Shi'a Muslims, Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses, non-theists, and Jews.

USCIRF Commissioners advocate for the release of individuals imprisoned for exercising their freedom of religion or belief through the RPOC project.

Biography of Reda Abdel Rahman

Reda Abdel Rahman is a teacher at the al-Azhar Institute in the northern governorate of Sharqiya as well as a former blogger on topics related to Qur'anism. Over the years, Reda has been arrested several times, each time for his expressing his religious beliefs as a Qur'anist. Qur'anists are a small Muslim minority in Egypt who regard the text of the Qur'an as the only legitimate source of authority for religious rulings. Their rejection of the authenticity and authority of the Hadith—the collected sayings and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions—contrasts with the views of Sunni Muslims, the

predominant religious community in Egypt, who consider the Hadith an indispensable religious source in addition to the Qur'an.

Authorities have subjected Reda and his family to harassment and prosecution for their religious beliefs. Prior to his first arrest, Reda's workplace investigated him for articles posted on his blog about Qur'anism, forcing him to promise that he would no longer write articles about religious texts. In October 2008, Sharqiya State Security forces raided Reda's home, arrested him, and questioned him about his religious beliefs and practices. No formal charges were filed. After more than 80 days, he was finally released in January 2009 following a court ruling ordering his release and prosecutors' last-ditch attempts to investigate him for blasphemy-related offenses.

In July 2015, authorities arrested Reda again and held him for a few days for promoting Qur'anism on his blog. Authorities ordered him to stop writing about his religious beliefs and communicating with his uncle, Qur'anist scholar and activist Dr. Ahmed Sobhy Mansour. Mansour, a leader of Egypt's Qur'anist movement and a former USCIRF Joseph R. Crapa fellow from 2009 to 2010, was arrested in the 1980s because of his religious beliefs, and he and his family faced repeated harassment and detention. In 2002, the United States granted Mansour and his family political asylum.

On the midnight of August 21/22, 2020, Egyptian security forces arrested Reda and several of his relatives. Authorities questioned Reda about his religious beliefs and his relationship with Dr. Ahmed Sobhy Mansour. While Reda's relatives were released a few days later, Reda remained under arrest and was forcibly disappeared for more than 40 days. After emerging on October 7, 2020, he appeared before state prosecution accused of joining ISIS and promoting religious extremism. The exact charges leveled against Reda are unclear. State investigators allege that Reda and two of Mansour's adult children living in the United States were planning terrorist attacks in Egypt, targeting the police and armed forces as part of a terrorist network Mansour had established. Authorities also claim to have confiscated weapons and explosives from Reda's home, but his legal team have been unable to review the alleged evidence.

Since his arrest in August 2020, Reda has remained in pre-trial detention, despite not being indicted on formal charges. Reda is being held at Kafr Saqr Police Station in Sharqiya. The criminal court in Zagazig, the capital of Sharqiya, continues to extend his imprisonment by multiple, successive terms of 45 days. The court's January 2022 order to renew his detention was the eighth such extension. On December 12, 2021, Reda turned 45. It was the third time he has spent his birthday in state custody.

Throughout his detention, Reda has complained of severe pain which has intensified during his prolonged detention. While "disappeared" between August and October 2020, he was denied proper food and clothing. Almost immediately, he began experiencing pronounced physical issues, including dental pain and back pain from being forced to sleep without a bed on the floor, for which he received no treatment. While his medical condition is not fully understood, a doctor in custody with Reda in the autumn of 2021 suggested his pain while urinating could indicate untreated kidney stones. While the region's public prosecutor approved the November 2021 request from Reda's family that he receive medical attention, prison authorities have not complied as of February 2022. Additionally, there are concerns about Reda's mental health following his brother's death in December 2021. Reda's family sent letters asking for him to be granted a leave to receive condolences with his family, but authorities did not respond.

Photo : Reda Abdel Rahman

A prestigious Egyptian NGO defends the rights of 'unrecognized' religions

Identity papers, marriage and burial places: the absent fundamental rights of citizens of 'unrecognized' religions

Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (13.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/348gOiW> - EIPR presented the government and parliament with executive and legislative proposals to guarantee the basic rights of people of "unrecognized" religions and beliefs in Egypt.

Today, EIPR launched a policy paper entitled "Identity Papers, Marriage and Burial Places: The Absent Fundamental Rights of Citizens of Unrecognized Religions in Egypt" presenting the government, parliament and decision makers executive and legislative proposals that essentially seek to ensure fundamental rights of Egyptian citizens not affiliated to the three religions, Islam, Christianity and Judaism, namely the right to obtain an identity card without having to write incorrect data in the field of religion, the right to obtain marriage certificates, the right to litigation in personal status matters, and their right to their own burial grounds.

The executive proposals include a decision to be issued by the Minister of Interior to form a special committee in the Civil Status Department to be the authority to register the "dash" (-) for the religion of citizens who are not affiliated with the three religions, at their request and acknowledgment thereof, instead of being forced to register an incorrect religion in which they do not believe; and a decision by the Minister of Justice to appoint delegated notaries to document the marriages of citizens whose religion field contains a dash (-) in their papers instead of the state's authorities so far refusing to document marriage certificates for them, and decisions issued by governors allocating lands for cemeteries (burial places) for citizens who do not belong to the three religions. In the forties and sixties, [the Egyptian state allocated several cemeteries for them](#) in the governorates of Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said and Sharqiya, and only one cemetery remains available from them in Cairo, and in December 27th 2021, [The Alexandria Administrative Court ruled](#) by refusing to oblige the Alexandria Governorate to allocate lands to be used as cemeteries for people other than followers of the three recognized religions.

Legislative proposals include another alternative to allow marriage documentation for citizens who do not belong to the three religions, which requires an amendment to Article 5 of the Civil Status Law (Law No. 143 of 1994) that allows the notary to document the marriage of citizens registered in the religion field with a sign (-), to be accompanied with an amendment to instructions to the notary issued by a decision of the Minister of Justice.

Legislative proposals also include the amendment of Article 3 of the Personal Status Law (Law No. 1 of 2000) that allows the right to litigate in personal status affairs according to the regulations of religious sects, and it is not required that these sects have gained official recognition and have judicial bodies before 1955, as the article states. This amendment allows for a temporary partial reform of the policies of recognition of religious sects, separating the recognition that includes acknowledgment of the practice of religious rites and the establishment of places of worship - which requires broader reforms - and the need to acknowledge the existence of the religious sect and guarantee the basic rights of citizens belonging to it, including the right to register marriages and litigation in personal status matters.

Amr Ezzat, researcher and officer in charge of the freedom of religion, belief and religious policies in EIPR, who prepared the proposals, asserts, "These executive decisions and legislative amendments represent the minimum level to protect some basic rights and remove forms of blatant discrimination that violate the most basic concepts of citizenship and cause great suffering and troubled legal conditions for citizens trying to obtain an identity card with correct data in the field of religion, obtain marriage certificates, or request the allocation of cemeteries to bury their dead. Therefore, these are urgent and necessary steps, while the broader reform must include constitutional amendments and deeper changes in the state's policies regarding religion, called for by EIPR in the recommendations of its reports, studies and detailed papers on the [Legal status of Al-Azhar](#), [Policies of managing mosques and Islamic religious affairs](#), [Regulating the establishment of places of worship](#), [Current status of the application of the law on building churches](#), [Policies to confront sectarian conflicts](#), [Problems of religious diversity](#) and [Freedom of expression in the field of religion](#)".

These proposals come against the background of the demands made by citizens who are not affiliated with the three religions, in light of the escalating public debate since 2015 under the titles "Renewal of Religious Discourse," "Religious Reform" and "Religious Revolution," which occupies large areas in the media and is repeated in the speeches of official officials, from the President of the Republic to the officials of religious institutions, politicians, academics and opinion-holders, while practical procedures and policies are still absent.

In November 2018, President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi, President of the Republic, said [in his speech during one of the sessions of the "World Youth Forum" in Sharm El-Sheikh](#), what can be considered statements that indicate the need for the state to guarantee religious freedoms for all spectrums of religious diversity beyond the three religions: Islam, the state religion, Christianity and Judaism, whose denominations are officially recognized by the state. where he said:

"The Egyptian state did not think before about building places of worship for citizens other than mosques, but now the state is interested in building in every new society (..) churches for its citizens because they have the right to worship as everyone worships, and even if we had other religions in Egypt, we would have built them places of worship; if we have Jews, we will build places of worship for them; and if we have other religions as well." He also said: "This is the right of a citizen to worship as he pleases, or not to worship at all by the way; this is a matter where we do not interfere." He also said: "There is no discrimination between one religion and another, all are equal, and this is not just talk, but rather practices that must be implemented, and transformed into sustainable stable policies and work mechanisms."

These statements were followed by reactions from citizens belonging to these religious diversities. Hatem Al-Hadi wrote on the Tahrir website an article entitled: "[Yes, Mr. President, there are other religions in Egypt](#)," in which he said that he is a Baha'i Egyptian citizen who welcomes these statements and hopes that they will be translated into policies that guarantee religious freedom for all, and pointed out that there are "problems that impede the right of Baha'is to citizenship like other Egyptians, including those related to the personal status law, the failure to allocate lands for graves to bury their dead, and these needs are now urgent (..) before they hope to build their own places of worship as you have stated and as permitted for Baha'is in the 160 countries whose representatives came to the World Youth Forum."

A number of citizens also signed a "[statement from atheist, non-religious, agnostic Egyptians or citizens who prefer to keep their beliefs private](#)." The statement says: "These statements are not reflected in any practices and policies undertaken by the state, and we await these practices and policies that emphasize freedom of belief and the

right of every citizen to believe what he wants without suffering from discrimination, obstruction or deprivation of the right, and we as citizens and as atheist, religious or agnostic individuals ask for our most basic rights, which is that the state does not lie in the field of religion in our official papers, as they still contain the religions of our fathers if they are among the three religions only available for registration in the religion field (Muslim - Christian - Jew), and attempts to leave it blank or write (-) were rejected by the Civil Status Department in the Ministry of Interior.

EIPR affirms that the rights and freedoms that these proposals aim to guarantee are not linked to joining a religious sect awaiting "recognition" from state agencies, but most of them are personal rights closely related to the right to citizenship, which must be guaranteed to individuals, whatever their belief; and in this case state policies and its legislation should be guarantors of these basic rights, while they currently contain many obstacles to these rights; these proposals aim to remove these obstacles.

Jehovah's Witnesses deregistered since 1960 defend their case at the UN Human Rights Committee

Text of their submission

HRWF/ AAJW & EAJW (12.01.2022) - On the occasion of the upcoming 134th session of the UN Human Rights Committee (28 February – 25 March 2022), the African Association of Jehovah's Witnesses (AAJW) and the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses (EAJW) filed a joint submission about the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Christian community of Jehovah's Witnesses has been present in Egypt since 1912. They obtained official registration in 1951 but were arbitrarily deregistered in 1960.
2. The campaign of misrepresentation and false accusations that led to the banning of the Christian community of Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt continues to keep these law-abiding citizens from enjoying the fundamental freedoms guaranteed in the Constitution of Egypt and in human rights instruments, including the Covenant, which was ratified by Egypt on 14 January 1982. Although more than 60 years have passed, officials continue to deny the Christian community of Jehovah's Witnesses the opportunity to meet with key authorities in order to resolve the situation.

II. Violations of the provisions of THE COVENANT

A. Loss of Religious Recognition and Denial of Re-registration (articles 18, 21, 22, 26 and 27)

3. In the 1930s, congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses were established in Alexandria and in Cairo. By the post-war years of 1945–1950, there were already a significant number of Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt.
4. Well into the 1950s, Egyptian Jehovah's Witnesses enjoyed relative freedom of worship. On 3 November 1951, the Cairo Governorate granted recognition to a branch of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania (Watch Tower Society), a legal corporation of Jehovah's Witnesses. In 1956, the Governorate of Alexandria granted similar recognition to the local congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses.
5. In 1959, a campaign of false accusations labelling Jehovah's Witnesses as "Zionists" caused the police to order the Witnesses to cease holding their religious services.
6. On 20 June 1960, a decree of the Ministry of Social Affairs deregistered the local branch of the Watch Tower Society and effectively banned the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in all Egypt. The pretext for the ban was an alleged failure to re-register according to Law 384 of 1956. All the property owned by Witness entities was confiscated. Efforts to re-register were rejected for "security reasons".
7. The campaign of anti-Witness articles in the Egyptian press increased, with articles becoming more numerous and increasingly defamatory. The inaccurate portrayal of Jehovah's Witnesses as Zionists caused them to be viewed as a security threat. The Boycott Office of the League of Arab Nations handed down a decree on 12 May 1964, stating that Arab nations would "ban absolutely all dealings with said society [Jehovah's Witnesses], along with all its branches and offices wherever these may be found, including the ensuing closure of its branches and offices in Arab States, and prohibiting the bringing in, and circulation/distribution of its publications and printed material".
8. For many decades Jehovah's Witnesses have been consistently taking a religious stance establishing that they are not Zionists. The organization of Jehovah's Witnesses is entirely religious and does not advocate any political arrangement, which would include Zionism. The political neutrality of Jehovah's Witnesses has been well documented, and in some lands the Witnesses have suffered severe persecution rather than compromise that neutrality. These views are reiterated today at greater length on the Witnesses' official website and should ensure that there is no ambiguity about their position.^[1]
9. The Administration of Land Registration and Documentation of the Ministry of Justice in Egypt issued three directives (in 1985, 1993 and 1999) that prohibit its agencies from registering any property belonging to the Watch Tower Society or to other entities of Jehovah's Witnesses.

^[1] "Are Jehovah's Witnesses Zionists?" Available at <https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/beliefs-about-zionism/>; Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, "Does Bible Prophecy Point to the Modern State of Israel?" Available at <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20101101/bible-prophecy-modern-state-israel/>.

10. A 1985 decree of the Ministry of Justice (Administrative Law No. 9) prevents Jehovah's Witnesses from officially registering both property ownership and marriages. On 23 March 2019, the High Administrative Court of Egypt rejected an appeal (No. 10698) to reverse this decree. This court also refused to refer the case to the Supreme Constitutional Court of Egypt for judgment. The court claimed that the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses contradict public order and morals in the country of Egypt.
11. As a result, property cannot be bought or owned in the name of any organized group of Jehovah's Witnesses. As an organization, Jehovah's Witnesses cannot even obtain land to bury their dead but must use privately owned cemeteries.
12. The misunderstanding or misrepresentation that led to the ban in 1960 continues to keep honest, law-abiding citizens who are Jehovah's Witnesses from enjoying the fundamental freedoms guaranteed in their Constitution and in human rights instruments ratified by Egypt, including the Covenant. More than 60 years later, Jehovah's Witnesses have still not been permitted to clarify their position by meeting with the highest authorities in the country.
13. Currently, the National Security Agency (NS) unlawfully interrogates and verbally harasses Witnesses on a monthly basis, summoning them without official authorization on the pretext of protecting national interests.

B. Restrictions on Places of Worship and on Manifestation of Belief (articles 18, 21, 22, 26 and 27)

14. The NS continues to search for and threaten Jehovah's Witnesses who are foreign nationals, especially those believed to be "leading ministers" and those associating with Egyptian Witnesses. During interrogations, agents try to intimidate the Witnesses and often threaten them with arrest in order to obtain information both about fellow believers in Egypt and about how the Witnesses are organized. By way of example:
 - i. March 2020: NS agents forcefully entered the homes of at least two Egyptian Witnesses, without a warrant or consent, in order to interrogate them about a married Witness couple who were foreign nationals lawfully resident in Egypt. Because of the threat of arrest and deportation, the couple fled Egypt and returned to the United States.
 - ii. April/May 2020: NS agents interrogated two Sudanese Witnesses about their peaceful religious activities.
15. Owing to the now over 60-year ban, Jehovah's Witnesses cannot build or own places of worship. Consequently, they are obliged to hold their peaceful religious meetings discreetly, in private homes. Many Witnesses report continued surveillance of their telephone conversations, their homes and their meeting locations. Additionally, the Witnesses are not permitted to import their religious literature or to manifest their religious beliefs by peacefully sharing a Bible message with persons who wish to receive it.
 - i. On 29 February 2020, two female Jehovah's Witnesses spoke about their faith to a Christian woman at a food court in Cairo. After the conversation ended, a member of the mall staff and a security officer approached the woman and interrogated her about

the conversation. The two Witnesses were able to leave the area before they could be questioned.

- ii. On 28 March 2020, an NS agent visited a Witness family in central Cairo to interrogate them about meetings held in their home.
 - iii. In February 2020, an Egyptian Witness who owns an apartment arranged for it to be completely renovated so as to be suitable for religious meetings and rented it to fellow worshippers. Since Witnesses cannot obtain a zoning permit to use property for their religious meetings, the NS repeatedly attempted to obtain a copy of the rental contract in order to file charges against the Witnesses involved. Despite repeated telephone calls and threats, the Witnesses refused to give the NS a copy of the contract. NS agents then interrogated and harassed the Witness landlord and ordered that the apartment be emptied and closed immediately. Subsequently, Jehovah's Witnesses have not been able to use the property.
16. The above incidents have occurred since the European Parliament's adoption of the 24 October 2019 Resolution on Egypt, which "stresses the importance of guaranteeing the equality of all Egyptians, regardless of their faith or belief; calls for Egypt to review its blasphemy laws in order to ensure the protection of religious minorities ... calls on the Egyptian authorities, including the military and security forces, to respect the rights of Christians, protect them against violence and discrimination and ensure that those responsible for such acts are prosecuted." (P9_TA-PROV (2019)0043)
17. During 2021, owing to Covid-19 precautions, all of Jehovah's Witnesses religious meetings have been held via videoconference. The NS has strenuously investigated who holds licences for a proprietary videoconferencing system, how meeting details are distributed, who the hosts are, the names of the attendees, etc. Such details constituted part of the information sought during interrogations of Jehovah's Witnesses.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

18. Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt and as a worldwide organization express concern for the government's refusal to recognize Jehovah's Witnesses as a Christian religion, its over 60-year denial of re-registration and its restrictions on places of worship and manifestation of peaceful religious beliefs. They respectfully request the Government of Egypt to take the necessary steps to:
- (1) Ensure that Jehovah's Witnesses are able to register their local religious organizations.
 - (2) End the continuous and intrusive surveillance and interrogations of Jehovah's Witnesses.
 - (3) Allow Egyptian and foreign Jehovah's Witnesses to worship peacefully and to associate with one another.
 - (4) Cancel the directives of the Administration of Land Registration and Documentation of the Ministry of Justice in Egypt that prohibit its agencies from registering title to property belonging to legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses.

(5) Abide by its commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Covenant for all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses.

19. AAJW and EAJW will consider submitting an additional complementary submission with the CCPR after the list of issues has been adopted.

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