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Egypt makes steps to improve relations with Jews and Christians



[Impact-se](#) (20.12.2024) - Egypt recently reformed state-issued textbooks to remove antisemitic and anti-Christian content, marking a crucial step toward fostering a more inclusive society. **Documented by IMPACTse, these changes include revising over 350 textbooks and eliminating content that vilifies Jews and Christians and promotes intolerance.**

In this updated review on the Egyptian general school curriculum, IMPACT-se examined textbooks for the current academic year (2023-24,) juxtaposing them with our analysis of textbooks published in previous years. A significant number of problematic examples flagged in IMPACT-se's previous report have been removed or moderated. The report covers 350 textbooks, covering publications from 2018 to 2024. The report focuses on Humanities subjects, namely Arabic Language, Islamic and Christian Religious Education, Social Studies, Values and Respect for the Other, National Education and Civics, History, Geography, and Philosophy.

This is an encouraging updated report of over 250 pages highlighting Egypt's progress in terms of civic education initiatives. However, some problematic narratives persist, such as minimizing the Holocaust or perpetuating harmful stereotypes, highlighting the need for ongoing reform. Partnering with NGOs will be essential to ensure these reforms will lead to lasting changes, offering hope for healing historical divisions.

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Legalisation of a new batch of unlicensed churches and religious service buildings

[Coptic Solidarity](#) (22.10.2024) - The **Cabinet-affiliated committee** charged with looking into the status of unlicensed churches to grant them legality has approved on 21 October 2024 the legalisation of a new batch of churches and affiliated service buildings.

The new batch comprises 293 churches and affiliated community service buildings, and is **the 28th since the committee undertook its task in September 2017** according to the 2016 Law for Building and Restoring Churches.

Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly presided over the Cabinet-affiliated committee meeting which reviewed the decisions taken during the previous meeting in January 2024.

Participating in the meeting were the **Minister of Justice**; also representatives of the construction department of the **Armed Forces** and representatives of **other ministries** and authorities concerned.

According to Cabinet spokesperson Mohamed al-Homosani, the recent decision brings the number of churches and affiliated community service buildings approved for **legalisation up to 3453 out of a total 3730 that had applied** for legalisation according to the 2016 law. Legalisation becomes final only when the approved churches comply with provisions of structural soundness and civil defence (safety) conditions, prove land ownership, and pay the required dues.

The last decision which involved 27th batch of churches and service buildings was made **last January**, some nine months ago. (...)

The Cabinet-affiliated committee charged with looking into applications for legalisation issues every few months approvals for legalising batches of churches and buildings in various regions in Egypt, belonging to the Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical Coptic Churches. **Legalisation becomes final only when the approved churches prove land ownership, pay any required dues, and comply with provisions of structural soundness and civil safety conditions.**

Given that a sizeable number of unlicensed churches were built in rural areas or underprivileged, unplanned urban areas characterised by very narrow streets, and crowded wall-to-wall small buildings, **complying with standard safety conditions has not been attainable in many cases.** Church officials complained about this to the Cabinet committee which then decided to involve the Ministry of Housing in resolving the issue by figuring out adequate safety requirements according to relevant building codes. Until this is resolved, churches have been required to fulfil the minimum precautionary measures, such as providing fire extinguisher facilities.

Man finally allowed to list Christian affiliation on ID card, authorities rule

Egyptian Christian who has been denied an ID card that correctly stated his religious affiliation for over 10 years wins case allowing him to engage in Christian activities.

ADF (21.08.2024) An Egyptian Christian who has been denied an ID card that correctly stated his religious affiliation for over 10 years has finally won his case with the support of ADF International.

Despite his Christian upbringing and faith, a clerical error by Egyptian authorities resulted in Cairo resident Elias* being listed as Muslim on all of his identification documents. Due to regulations set forth by Egypt's Ministry of Interior, this error prevented Elias from being able to engage in Christian activities, including sending his children to a Christian school.

His repeated requests for the authorities to recognize his chosen faith were ignored, leaving him and his family subject to discrimination in many of the basic activities he wanted to engage in and preventing his children from receiving a Christian education.

ADF International supported the case through its allied attorney network, resulting in the government ordering that Elias' documents be changed to reflect his religious beliefs.

"In Egypt, we are aware of numerous cases where religious minorities suffer discrimination and harassment when they request to change their religion on their identity documents. Despite years of legal challenges and attempts to change the law to reflect religious freedom standards, the situation has remained largely unchanged. We are delighted that Elias' request was finally allowed, and we will continue to support other individuals who face issues with their identity cards. No one should be denied religious freedom because of registration requirements," said Kelsey Zorzi, Director of Global Religious Freedom.

Background

In Egypt, where the Ministry of Interior makes it mandatory for every citizen to hold identity documents that state their religious affiliation, an ID card that erroneously states one's religion as being Muslim can lead to severe violations of religious freedom. Every year, religious minorities are refused their requests to change their religion on their documents from Islam to a different religion, and this can lead to discrimination, hostility, and restrictions to family life.

Religious persecution in Egypt

In addition to Elias, ADF International is supporting international legal efforts for the release of [Nour Girgis and Abdulbaqi Saeed Abdo](#), two Christian men who have been held in pre-trial detention for over two years. The men were arrested in 2021 for their involvement with a Facebook page that is dedicated to supporting people who have converted from Islam to Christianity. Authorities arrested the men after discovering their affiliation with the page, spuriously linking their involvement with terrorism activities.

ADF International is pursuing international legal mechanisms to advocate for their urgent release following a [letter from Abdo](#) to his family where he vowed to commence a hunger strike due to the injustice he has endured.

**Name changed for security purposes*

Two Christians accused of 'terrorism', a call for their release

Religious freedom advocates call on Egypt to release detained Christians accused of 'terrorism' for peaceful engagement on Facebook

- Two Christian Egyptian men arrested, held without trial for over two years, for answering theological questions on Facebook.
- ADF International backs international legal efforts for their release.

ADF (04.06.2024) ADF International is calling upon Egyptian authorities to release two Christian men who have been held in pre-trial detention for over two years. The men, **Nour Girgis and Abdulbaqi Saeed Abdo**, were arrested in 2021 for their involvement with a Facebook page that is dedicated to supporting people who have converted from Islam to Christianity. Authorities arrested the men after discovering their affiliation with the page, spuriously linking their involvement with terrorism activities.

The two men have been moved around to different detention centers while awaiting their repeatedly postponed criminal trials. In addition to the very poor conditions which have negatively impacted their physical health, they only have been allowed occasional visits from their families and legal counsel.

"The arbitrary detention of these two Christian men without trial constitutes a severe violation of their human rights," said [Elizabeth Francis](#), Legal Counsel for ADF International's [Global Religious Freedom](#) team. *"The peaceful expression of one's religious convictions is not terrorism. No one should be imprisoned for supporting Christian converts, let alone be told that they are a national security risk for expressing their beliefs."*

"We are calling on the government of Egypt to abide by its international human rights obligations, and immediately ensure that both men receive justice and a fair trial, and ultimately a safe and speedy return to their families. The rights to religious freedom, free expression, and a fair trial are all enshrined in international law, and Egyptian authorities have blatantly violated these basic rights by detaining these men and prolonging their imprisonment. It is past time for these men to be released," added [Kelsey Zorzi](#), Director of Advocacy for Global Religious Freedom for ADF International.

"The freedom of religion and belief is an unalienable human right, worthy of the highest protection. What has happened to these two men in Egypt is unacceptable, and an undeniable violation of their right to worship freely. Hostility towards religion is becoming a global problem, and advocates for freedom must continue to speak out against these injustices that plague religious minorities, including in Egypt. These two men must be released and exonerated," said Samuel Brownback, former U.S. Senator, Governor of Kansas, and Ambassador-At-Large for International Religious Freedom.

ADF International is supporting their legal defence and using international legal mechanisms to advocate for their release.

"The arbitrary detention of these two Christian men without trial constitutes a severe violation of their human rights. The peaceful expression of one's religious convictions is not terrorism. No one should be imprisoned for supporting Christian converts, let alone be told that they are a national security risk for expressing their beliefs."

- Elizabeth Francis, Legal Counsel for ADF International's Global Religious Freedom team

Arrested for their faith

Egyptian born **Nour Girgis**, a pharmaceutical employee, was asked by his employer to report to a police station in November 2021 to answer questions, during which time he was kept incommunicado for forty days. He was then transferred to the Terrorism Unit where a prosecutor verbally informed him that he was being held under the terrorism laws for leading a Facebook group named "Al Abareen" (*Arabic, meaning "to cross*

over”), and because he had allegedly blasphemed against Islam. Girgis has been repeatedly interrogated about his activities and whether he has any links to Western organisations. He has also reported facing humiliation and torture at the hands of the prison guards. His trial date has been continuously pushed back and he has not had the opportunity to prepare a sufficient defence with his lawyer.

Abdulbaqi Saeed, originally from Yemen, also was arrested in December 2021 for his connection to the “Al Abareen” Facebook page and his public evangelism. He subsequently has been transferred to various detention cells while he awaits his repeatedly postponed criminal trial, despite suffering from severe medical issues. He only has been allowed occasional visits from his wife and children, including his son who was born while he was in detention.

ADF International has submitted information to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on behalf of Girgis and Saeed, citing that both men have been deprived of their right to religious freedom and a fair trial under international law.
