



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Egypt

Egypt – EGY38046 – Evangelical
Christians – Churches – Presence –
Activities – Treatment Proselytising

4 February 2011

1. Please provide information about the presence and activities of Evangelical churches in Egypt, and any information about the response of state authorities or individual Muslims to their attempts to evangelise/proselytise.

Evangelical Christians form a relatively small religious minority in Egypt.¹ A June 2010 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) report estimates their numbers to be one million, among a total population of over 80 million.² The vast majority of Egyptian Christians are Orthodox Copts, who constitute between eight to twelve per cent of the country's population. Other Christian denominations, including Evangelicals constitute only one per cent of the population.³

The term “evangelical” in Arabic is *ingili* or *injili*, which is a broad term that does not refer to a specific denomination, but rather to various Protestant Christian denominations that proselytise or seek to convert those of other faiths.⁴ Both DFAT and the US State Department indicate that in Egypt, the term ‘evangelical’ is essentially synonymous with “Protestant” and the terms are used interchangeably. The term ‘Coptic Evangelical’ is also used to describe Copts who proselytise or attempt to convert those of other faiths.⁵

The exact number of churches serving the Evangelical community is difficult to precisely determine. DFAT reported in June 2010 that detailed information is not publicly available about Evangelical churches ‘...due to the sensitive nature of sectarianism in Egypt.’ That said, DFAT was able to advise that: ‘There are approximately 1200 official and 300 unofficial Protestant/ Evangelical (including Anglican and Baptist) churches located throughout Egypt,

¹ Bradley, M 2009, “Evangelicals woo Egyptian Copts”, *The National*, 10 November, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/worldwide/africa/evangelicals-woo-egyptian-copts> – Accessed 13 December 2010 – Attachment 1.

² DIAC Country Information Service 2010, Country Information Report No. 10/35 – CIS Request No. EGY10290: Egypt: Evangelical Churches in Egypt, (Sourced from DFAT advice of 21 June 2010) 21 June – CX245250.

³ US Department of State 2010, “Background Note: Egypt”, 10 November, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5309.htm> – Accessed 29 November 2010 – Attachment 3.

⁴ Badr, H 2000, “The Protestant Evangelical Community in the Middle East: Impact On Cultural and Societal Developments”, *International Review of Mission*, 89(352), pp 60–69 – Attachment 4; Cornetta, A. 2009, “Friction Among Egypt’s Christians”, 16 October, *Bikya Masr*, <http://bikyamasr.com/wordpress/?p=4867> – Accessed 23 November 2010 – Attachment 5.

⁵ Cornetta, A. 2009, ‘Friction Among Egypt’s Christians’, 16 October, *Bikya Masr*, <http://bikyamasr.com/wordpress/?p=4867> – Accessed 23 November 2010 – Attachment 5.

particularly in the governorates of Cairo, Minya, Asyut, Qena and Alexandria where there are a higher proportion of non-orthodox Christians’.

The 2010 US State Department *International Religious Freedom Report* reflects similar information regarding the number of Protestant/Evangelical denominations, identifying 16 Evangelical Protestant denominations in Egypt. According to the report, these include:

Presbyterian, Anglican, Baptist, Brethren, Open Brethren, Revival of Holiness (Nahdat al-Qadaasa), Faith (Al-Eyman), Church of God, Christian Model Church (Al-Mithaal Al-Masihi), Apostolic, Grace (An-Ni’ma), Pentecostal, Apostolic Grace, Church of Christ, Gospel Missionary (Al-Kiraaza bil Ingil), and the Message Church of Holland (Ar-Risaala).⁶

As stated above, detailed information about individual evangelical churches and congregations operating in Egypt and their activities are difficult to locate, however, some information was located about two larger congregations and one evangelical organisation, which are discussed below. Indications that these organisations are active in community development programs corroborates DFAT from June 2010 reporting⁷ that many Protestant churches are engaged in such activities.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt, Synod of the Nile

One of the largest evangelical churches is the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt, Synod of the Nile (EPCE). This church is sometimes referred to as ‘the Evangelical Church of Egypt’⁸ and also as the ‘Synod of the Nile’ Church. An unreferenced Wikipedia entry states that the EPCE is variously known in Arabic as the ‘Kanisah El-Injiliyah’, and also as the Coptic Evangelical Church of Egypt.⁹

The World Council of Churches¹⁰ reports that the EPCE was founded in 1854 by American Presbyterian missionaries. According to the WCC, this church became autonomous in 1926 and serves local communities through social, educational, medical, and evangelistic and mission programs. Frequently referred to as the Synod of the Nile Church, this church claims a membership of 250,000. The WCC reports that there are 234 pastors and 314 congregations, which operate 23 mission schools and 37 mixed age schools.

This church is credited with co-founding two leading universities; the American University in Cairo and Cairo University. It also operates the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo,

⁶ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010 – Egypt*, 17 November – Section I – Attachment 3.

⁷ DIAC Country Information Service 2010, Country Information Report No. 10/35 – CIS Request No. EGY10290: Egypt: Evangelical Churches in Egypt, (Sourced from DFAT advice of 21 June 2010) 21 June – CX245250.

⁸ ‘Coptic and Evangelical Churches trade barbs’ 2009, Almasryalyoum 4 October <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/news/coptic-and-evangelical-churches-trade-barbs> - Accessed 23 December 2010 – Attachment 7.

⁹ ‘Evangelical Church of Egypt (Synod of the Nile)’ 2010, Wikipedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Church_of_Egypt_\(Synod_of_the_Nile\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Church_of_Egypt_(Synod_of_the_Nile)) - Accessed 23 December 2010 – Attachment 8. (Note: Wikipedia is a Web-based free-content encyclopaedia which is compiled collaboratively by volunteers and the collaborative nature of Wikipedia makes it vulnerable to contributors with overt or covert agendas, and Wikipedia articles are thus prone to unacknowledged bias.)

¹⁰ ‘Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt Synod of the Nile’ 2006, Website of the World Council of Churches, 1 January, <http://www.oikoumene.org/member-churches/regions/middle-east/egypt/evangelical-presbyterian-church-of-egypt-synod-of-the-nile.html> – Accessed 16 December 2010 – Attachment 9.

which trains pastors from Africa and the Middle East and trains congregation members to work in hospitals, youth centres, nursing homes, and orphanages. Church activities are located in Alexandria, Port Said, and ‘...several others in different places in Egypt.’¹¹

Kasr El Dobra Evangelical Church

Kasr El Dobra Evangelical Church (KDEC) is a Presbyterian church headquartered in Cairo and it has been described as the largest protestant evangelical church in the Middle East. Information was obtained from a website operated by the First Presbyterian Church located in Louisiana, USA, which is hosting a conference with KDEC in 2011. The website reports that 6,000 Egyptians attend church services with KDEC weekly. It also reports that this church has active ministries devoted to drug rehabilitation, sports, ‘recovery’ and ‘mercy’.¹²

Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS)

The Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) is an Egyptian Christian development organization headquartered in Cairo, Egypt, with operations in several cities.¹³ According to the CEOSS website, this organisation operates extensive Christian-based development programs throughout Egypt, stating:

It [CEOSS] is dedicated to social and cultural development, individual well-being, social justice, and inter-cultural harmony. It delivers its services regardless of gender, race, religion, or beliefs. As a Christian voice promoting pluralism and mutual respect in an Egyptian context, CEOSS encourages the participation of Egyptians from all segments of society—Muslim and Christian, rich and poor...

CEOSS is registered with the Egyptian Ministry of Social Affairs and claims to provide services to more than 2 million Egyptians annually in more than 100 rural and urban communities.

Proselytising Activities

Evangelical Churches in Egypt do engage in proselytising activities, however, due to societal pressures and unofficial disapproval of such practices by many authorities, Evangelical Christians avoid publicising these activities. This being the case, reports of these evangelical activities are scarce. DFAT, in June 2010, characterised this issue in the following manner:

While proselytising is not illegal in theory, in practice, it can lead to arrest, detention and mistreatment for ‘contempt of religion’ under Article 98 of the Penal Code. This is particularly the case if Christians are found proselytising to Muslims. Converts from Islam to Christianity can be subject to a high level of scrutiny and serious harassment from state security services. Evangelists in Egypt consider proselytising

¹¹ ‘Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt Synod of the Nile’ 2006, Website of the World Council of Churches, 1 January, <http://www.oikoumene.org/member-churches/regions/middle-east/egypt/evangelical-presbyterian-church-of-egypt-synod-of-the-nile.html> – Accessed 16 December 2010 – Attachment 9.

¹² ‘First Presbyterian Church is pleased to host the 5th annual KDEC Partnership Conference, January 12-14, 2011’ 2010, First Presbyterian Church Baton Rouge <http://www.fpcbr.org/fpc/furtherintotheworld/globalmissions/kdeconference.aspx> - Accessed 24 December 2010 – Attachment 10.

¹³ ‘Egypt - ELCA Companions in Egypt’ undated, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America website <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Global-Mission/Where-We-Work/Europe-Middle-East/Egypt.aspx> - Accessed 24 December 2010 – Attachment 11.

an obligation of their faith, however members of the congregation are advised to work carefully within allowed limits. This includes proselytising only among other Christians, including orthodox Coptic Christians, and ensuring a parallel secular curriculum for Muslim participants in any Christian community programs.

Under these circumstances, it is very likely that the community development programs promoted by large Evangelical churches discussed above, also serve evangelising goals on an inconspicuous level.

The 2010 *US Commission on International Religious Freedom* report also indicated that Evangelical Christians are engaged in discreet proselytising activities with some directed specifically at youths. They use resources provided by US churches to fund community programs such as sports and religious retreats, and compete against Orthodox Christian organisations by reaching out to young people with ‘slick advertising and handouts.’¹⁴

A 2008 *Compass Direct* article on Muslim conversions to Christianity reported that Evangelicals are very secret about their activities so as not to be subjected to mistreatment by authorities and a society which is predominately Muslim. The article states that conversions and baptisms are done in secret and these activities are publicly denied by evangelical church leaders. It reports a Coptic Bishop as stating that all Christian denominations: ‘...[Coptic, Catholic, Evangelical] publicly claim they do not baptize converts, each blaming the other for doing so, while priests and pastors are known to baptize in secret so as not to provoke violent reactions from Islamists and the government.’¹⁵

A new trend in proselytising activities by Evangelicals has opened them up to criticism from Orthodox Coptic Christians who accuse them of seeking converts in their ranks. In 2009 at least two sources reported on apparent “friction” between the evangelical Christian community and the Orthodox Coptic Church in Egypt.¹⁶ *The National*, for example, reported that

...over the past few months, the Orthodox church’s traditionally defensive stance has turned to face a new opponent. Prominent Orthodox leaders have publicly accused Protestant Evangelicals – a Christian sect with strong roots in the United States – of recruiting Orthodox youth as part of a broader plot to evangelise Egypt’s estimated eight million Christians.¹⁷

Treatment

Christian evangelicals are on occasion subjected to mistreatment in Egypt as part of a broad sectarian rift between Muslims and non-Muslim groups. Many reports of incidents of violence against Christians do not distinguish between attacks on evangelical Christians versus other denominations. DFAT in the June 2010 advice addressed the general mistreatment of Christian Evangelicals, stating:

¹⁴ USCIRF Annual Report 2010 - The Commission's Watch List: Egypt, 29 March (CISNET Egypt CX248955)

¹⁵ ‘One convert's never-ending struggle’ 2008, *Compass Direct*, 12 September, (CISNET Egypt CX210012)

¹⁶ Bradley, M 2009, ‘Evangelicals woo Egyptian Copts’, *The National*, 10 November, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/worldwide/africa/evangelicals-woo-egyptian-copts> – Accessed 13 December 2010 – Attachment 1; Cornetta, A. 2009, ‘Friction Among Egypt’s Christians’, 16 October, *Bikya Masr* (news blog), <http://bikyamasr.com/wordpress/?p=4867> – Accessed 23 November 2010 – Attachment.

¹⁷ Bradley, M 2009, ‘Evangelicals woo Egyptian Copts’, *The National*, 10 November, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/worldwide/africa/evangelicals-woo-egyptian-copts> – Accessed 13 December 2010 – Attachment 1.

Post is aware of reports of Evangelical Christians being affected by incidents of sectarian violence. The pattern of increased attacks targeting orthodox Coptic Christians and their property in recent years can be broadly applied to non-orthodox Christians given most Egyptians, ninety percent of whom are Muslim, do not differentiate between the two schools. However, due to their much smaller numbers and less conspicuous public presence, non-orthodox Christians appear to experience relatively less violence than their orthodox counterparts.¹⁸

DFAT also reports that Christian groups, in general, are discriminated against by authorities. This includes withholding approval of building permits for churches, discriminating against Christians during investigations of violence, and enabling perpetrators of violence against Christians to avoid punishment. These actions and attitudes by authorities create a culture of acceptance of discrimination toward Christians in general. The DFAT report states:

Government requirements that Christians seek permission to build or repair churches are regulated at the grassroots level by local authorities, who can be deliberately interfering and obstructive. Local authorities are also heavily involved in reinstating order during instances of sectarian violence. Complaints about their discriminatory attitudes towards Christians include an unwillingness to intervene to protect Christian property, the imposition of calm through excessive violence, collective punishment, arbitrary arrests and detention with little regard for whether targets are victims or perpetrators. The routine use of 'reconciliation meetings' between Muslims and Christians as an alternative to the justice system often leaves victims without compensation and further fosters a culture of impunity.

It is worth noting that incidents of sectarian violence are more pronounced in poorer Upper Egyptian governorates like Asyut and surrounding areas, where there is also a higher proportion of Christians. The Evangelical movement in Egypt began in Asyut and the church continues to have a strong presence in the region.¹⁹

According to the US State Department's 2010 *International Religious Freedom* (IRF) report, while proselytising is not illegal in Egypt, engaging in these activities may result in harassment, threats, short detentions, and other mistreatment. The IRF states:

[n]either the [Egyptian] constitution nor the civil and penal codes prohibit proselytizing...[however] police have detained or otherwise harassed those accused of proselytizing on charges of ridiculing or insulting heavenly religions or inciting sectarian strife.²⁰

Proselytising to Muslims is particularly sensitive.²¹ The *IRF* report notes that the government "restricts...efforts" to proselytise Muslims and foreign religious workers are generally tolerated on the "condition" that they do not attempt to proselytise to those of the Islamic

¹⁸ DIAC Country Information Service 2010, Country Information Report No. 10/35 – CIS Request No. EGY10290: Egypt: Evangelical Churches in Egypt, (Sourced from DFAT advice of 21 June 2010) 21 June – CX245250.

¹⁹ DIAC Country Information Service 2010, Country Information Report No. 10/35 – CIS Request No. EGY10290: Egypt: Evangelical Churches in Egypt, (Sourced from DFAT advice of 21 June 2010) 21 June – CX245250.

²⁰ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010 – Egypt*, 17 November Section II – Attachment 6.

²¹ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010 – Egypt*, 17 November – Section II Attachment 6.

faith.²² A 2009 article in the UK's *Times* newspaper indicated that Christian proselytising to Muslims has added to tensions between the two religious communities in Egypt:

Muslims complain...that Western Christians, especially evangelical churches in America, have been using the Copts and the few Egyptian Protestant churches to proselytise among the Muslim majority.

The issue of changing religion is explosive, and there is widespread anger at attempts at proselytising and numerous instances of Muslims being killed who converted.²³

Islam is the official state religion of Egypt and the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law) are the primary sources of legislation.²⁴ Shari'a law prohibits conversion from Islam to other religions ("apostasy", a crime punishable by death under Shari'a law) and reports indicate that some Egyptian Muslims who have converted to Christianity have been scrutinised, harassed, threatened or mistreated by state actors and/or Muslims in the wider community.²⁵ Given that there are significant sensitivities around apostasy in Egypt, proselytising activities of evangelical Christians would likely attract negative attention from the authorities and Muslims.

A November 2010 article in the Coptic publication *Kopten*, captures the general sentiment toward Coptic Christians, which would be equally applicable to other Christians engaged in proselytising activities. The article states:

They [Christians] are accepted by some in Egypt and openly discriminated against by others. Violent attacks against Christians – which the government does little to prevent – accentuate tensions. The state also routinely harasses converts to Christianity from Islam. Many have to live in some sort of hiding.

A report from the *Jubilee Campaign*, an organisation that provides legal assistance to persecuted Christians around the world, states that Christians experience discrimination under Egyptian law. The report also notes that Christians are 'all too often subjected to violent persecution at the hands of the country's Muslim majority – particularly by its concentration of Islamic extremists.' A country report from the *Jubilee Campaign* notes that '[p]olice and other Egyptian authorities have shown little interest in protecting Christian victims or prosecuting attackers'.²⁶ The same assessment is carried in the 2010 Freedom House *Annual*

²² US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010 – Egypt*, 17 November – Section II Attachment 6.

²³ Binyon, M 2009, "Copts between the rock of Islamism and a hard place", *The Times*, 13 November, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article6916192.ece> – Accessed 13 December 2010 – Attachment 14.

²⁴ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010 – Egypt*, 17 November, Introduction– Attachment 6.

²⁵ See for example US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010 – Egypt*, 17 November – Attachment 6, sec II; US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) 2010, *Annual Report*, May – Attachment 12, p 232; Darwish, N 2009, "The scandal of apostate killing", *FrontPage Magazine*, 3 August, <http://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/p18142.xml> – Accessed 15 December 2010 – Attachment 15; Becket Fund for Religious Liberty 2009, United Nations Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review – Egypt: Submission of The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty", http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session7/EG/BF_UPR_EGY_S07_2010_TheBecketFundforReligiousLiberty.pdf – Accessed 14 December 2010 – Attachment 16, p 5.

²⁶ 'Egypt profile', undated, *Jubilee Campaign*, http://www.jubileecampaign.org/home/jubilee/egypt_profile.pdf – Accessed 25 November 2010 – Attachment 17.

Report, which states: ‘When clashes between Christians and Muslims occur, the authorities generally attempt to downplay the sectarian nature of the violence.’²⁷

There are instances where police do provide protection for Christians. For example, following an attack on a Coptic church in Baghdad in October 2010, Egyptian police doubled patrols at churches in Egypt and closed access roads, fearing copycat attacks.²⁸

Several incidents specifically concerning Evangelical Christians, and Christians conducting proselytising activities, were located and are summarised below:

- In 2010, the US State Department and an Egyptian newspaper reported on the case of a group of young evangelical Christians who were arrested in Alexandria in May 2010 for “distributing evangelistic books and pamphlets”.²⁹ The *Almasryalyoum* indicated that the young evangelicals had been arrested under the “Emergency Law” and cited the opinion of a human rights activist that this was “illegal, given that their activities had nothing to do with terrorism or drugs, which make up the entire remit of the Emergency Law since its amendment this month”.³⁰ The young people were released after two days in detention.³¹
- In March 2010, Christian news source *Assyrian International News Agency* reported that an evangelical pastor and his wife had been assaulted by security agents in the city of Luxor, 700 kilometres from Cairo, “in order to evacuate them by force from their home and demolish Church property”.³² The article reported that at the time of the incident, the church believed it was “still in negotiations” with authorities to find a replacement for a building on its compound which had to be vacated so that it could be knocked down to make way for an archaeological excavation.³³ The pastor was reportedly beaten and “dragged away” after he placed himself in the way of the demolition team, and his wife was slapped and pulled “by the hair” to force her to leave their flat on the church compound.³⁴

²⁷ Freedom House 2010, *Freedom in the World – Egypt (2010)*, June <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2010&country=7816> – Accessed 10 September 2010 – Attachment 18.

²⁸ King, W. 2010, ‘Anti-Christian Sentiment in Egypt Heats Up: Terrorist threat in Iraq emerges at importune moment for Copts’, *Kopten*, 24 November, http://www.kopten.at/kopten/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=471&catid=78 – Accessed 25 November 2010 – Attachment 19.

²⁹ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010 – Egypt*, 17 November – Attachment 6 (source of quotation); see also Bayoumi, A 2010, “[Thirteen] evangelicals arrested in Alexandria”, *Almasryalyoum*, 24 May, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/news/13-evangelicals-arrested-alexandria> – Accessed 13 December 2010 – Attachment 20.

³⁰ Bayoumi, A 2010, “[Thirteen] evangelicals arrested in Alexandria”, *Almasryalyoum*, 24 May, <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/news/13-evangelicals-arrested-alexandria> – Accessed 13 December 2010 – Attachment 20.

³¹ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2010 – Egypt*, 17 November – Attachment 6.

³² Abdelmassih, M 2010, “Egyptian State Security Demolishes Evangelical Church, Assaults Pastor”, *Assyrian International News Agency*, 24 March, <http://www.aina.org/news/20100323193843.htm> – Accessed 23 November 2010 – Attachment 21.

³³ Abdelmassih, M 2010, “Egyptian State Security Demolishes Evangelical Church, Assaults Pastor”, *Assyrian International News Agency*, 24 March, <http://www.aina.org/news/20100323193843.htm> – Accessed 23 November 2010 – Attachment 21.

³⁴ Abdelmassih, M 2010, “Egyptian State Security Demolishes Evangelical Church, Assaults Pastor”, *Assyrian International News Agency*, 24 March, <http://www.aina.org/news/20100323193843.htm> – Accessed 23 November 2010 – Attachment 21.

- In February 2009, local police arrested two Christians at the Cairo International Book Fair who were allegedly distributing free copies of the Bible to book fair patrons for the purpose of proselytizing. The two young men claim that they were tortured with physical blows and electric shocks in the State Security police headquarters in Assyout after they were arrested and forcibly returned to the governorate.³⁵ A number of sources claim that the state carries out such arrests because they think missionary work could ignite sectarian violence and it therefore must be controlled.³⁶

Attachments

1. Bradley, M 2009, "Evangelicals woo Egyptian Copts", *The National*, 10 November, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/worldwide/africa/evangelicals-woo-egyptian-copts> – Accessed 13 December 2010.
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³⁵ Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2009, *Freedom of Religion and Belief in Egypt Quarterly Report*, July-September, p.27-28 http://eipr.org/sites/default/files/reports/pdf/FRBQ_July_Sept_09_EN.pdf – Accessed 23 February 2010 – Attachment 22; Mayton, J. 2009, 'EGYPT: Coptic arrests inflame Egypt's sectarian tensions' *The Jerusalem Post*, source: *The Media Line*, 9 February – CX220224.

³⁶ Mayton, J. 2009, 'EGYPT: Coptic arrests inflame Egypt's sectarian tensions' *The Jerusalem Post*, source: *The Media Line*, 9 February – CX220224; Christian Solidarity Worldwide 2009, *Briefing: Egypt Religious Freedom Profile*, September, pp.13-14 <http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=report&id=118> – Accessed 23 February 2010 – Attachment 24.

10. 'First Presbyterian Church is pleased to host the 5th annual KDEC Partnership Conference, January 12-14, 2011' 2010, First Presbyterian Church Baton Rouge <http://www.fpcbr.org/fpc/furtherintotheworld/globalmissions/kdecconference.aspx> - Accessed 24 December 2010.
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