



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

Egypt - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 28 December 2011.

Information on available state protection for Copts

In June 2011 the *Middle East Media Research Institute* points out that:

“Since the January 25, 2011 revolution, Egypt has seen several clashes between Muslims and Copts, and attacks on Coptic churches have increased.”(Middle East Media Research Institute (2 June 2011) *In Egypt, Muslims' Attacks on Copts Increase*)

A report issued in October 2011 by *IRIN News* notes:

“Already, more than 100,000 Christians have left Egypt since Mubarak’s fall in fear of the swift rise of political Islam, according to a recent study by local Christian NGO Egyptian Federation for Human Rights.” (IRIN News (11 October 2011) *Analysis: What the “sectarian” clashes say about Egypt’s revolution*)

The *New York Times* in May 2011 states that:

“Tensions between Muslims and Coptic Christians, who make up about 10 percent of the population here, have risen steadily since the sweeping vows of unity during the revolution that toppled President Hosni Mubarak three months ago. Copts say they have felt increasingly embattled since clashes just south of Cairo left a church burning last month.” (New York Times (15 May 2011) *Muslims and Coptic Christians Clash Again in Egypt*)

Reuters in October 2011 notes:

“Tension between Muslims and minority Coptic Christians has simmered for years but has worsened since the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, which has allowed the emergence of Salafist and other strict Islamist groups that the former president had repressed.” (Reuters (10 October 2011) *Egypt executes man for 2010 Coptic shooting*)

In September 2011 the *Society for Threatened Peoples* notes that:

“Seven months after the overthrow of dictator Hosni Mubarak the situation of the Copts in Egypt has not tangibly improved, according to the Society for Threatened Peoples (STP).” (Society for Threatened Peoples (14 September 2011) *Egypt: seven months after the fall of Mubarak, Copts still waiting for justice and an end to discrimination*)

This report also states:

“Egypt’s authorities offer only half-hearted protection for the rights the religious minority, who make up approximately ten percent of the population.” (ibid)

In October 2011 a report headed by the *Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies* states:

“The undersigned organizations condemn the unprecedented extra-judicial killings and acts of violence committed by military police and central security forces, on the 9th of October in the Maspero area and central Cairo. Peaceful protesters demanding rights for Coptic citizens were attacked, leading to at least 25 deaths and 300 injuries, some critical.” (Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (16 October 2011) *Maspero: state incitement of sectarian violence and policy of extrajudicial killings*)

This document also notes:

“The undersigned organizations are deeply skeptical of all of the investigations announced by SCAF since it took power. We also emphasize our disappointment at the lack of a speech by the Prime Minister, and at the press conference held by SCAF, during which they took least possible of responsibility for this heinous crime. Both SCAF and the government were keen to describe the killings as clashes between Muslims and Christians, along with unidentified 'foreign elements'. Both ignored the involvement of the armed forces, whose direct responsibility for the killing of civilians was evidenced by eyewitnesses and television cameras. SCAF, rather than opening an investigation into the official media's coverage of the events, instead praised its neutrality. It ignored the media's culpability in calling on citizens to take to the streets and protect the army, which constituted direct incitement of sectarian clashes. This confirms the unwillingness of both SCAF and the government to break with the policies of Mubarak's security regime, which exacerbated the problem of sectarianism and made religious minorities, along with their property and places of worship, into targets for various forms of attacks without fear of consequences.” (ibid)

SCAF is an acronym for The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces.

A document issued in October 2011 by the *European Parliament* points out that:

“Since March 2011, tens of thousands of Coptic Christians have reportedly left Egypt. On 9 October, at least 25 were killed and more than 300 wounded in Cairo during a peaceful march organised by Copts. Parliament strongly condemns the killing of protestors in Egypt, and stresses the importance of an independent and transparent investigation. Authorities should ensure that Copts do not fall victim to violent attacks and can live in peace and freely express their beliefs throughout the country, the resolution says. MEPs call for protection of churches, to put an end to their destruction and to continuous aggression by Islamic extremists. MEPs are concerned about the kidnapping of Coptic girls who have been forced to convert to Islam. They add that Egyptian authorities must end discrimination against Coptic Christians.” (European Parliament (27 October 2011) *Parliament stands up for Christians in Egypt and Syria*)

A report published in November 2011 by the *Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe/PACE* states:

“We call on the Egyptian authorities and in particular on the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to protect effectively the Coptic community, to investigate the events of 9 October 2011 and to bring to justice those responsible for violence so as to ensure a peaceful environment for the up-coming elections.” (Parliamentary

Assembly of the Council of Europe/PACE (15 November 2011) *PACE Political Affairs Committee calls on Egyptian authorities to protect effectively the Coptic community*

The *Financial Times* in December 2011 states:

“In the months since the uprising, relations between Muslims and the Christian minority appear to have taken another nosedive, with eruptions of sectarian violence becoming even more frequent than before the revolution. Christians continue to complain of harassment and discrimination.” (Financial Times (22 December 2011) *Christians: Copts frightened by rise of political Islam*)

In April 2011 the *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom* states:

“The Egyptian government has failed to protect religious minorities, particularly Coptic Christians, from violent attacks, including during the transitional period when minority communities are increasingly vulnerable.” (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (28 April 2011) *USCIRF Annual Report 2011 - Countries of Particular Concern: Egypt*)

This report also points out that:

“...attacks on minorities, particularly Coptic Christians, including by Islamist militants imposing extra-judicial punishments, have risen and have resulted in deaths and injuries.” (ibid)

A report published in November 2011 by *Amnesty International* notes:

“The SCAF failed to address discrimination against women, entrenched both in law and practice, or promote the right to freedom of religion for the Copts and other religious minorities.” (Amnesty International (22 November 2011) *Broken promises, Egypt's military rulers erode human rights*, p.7)

This document also points out that:

“The SCAF have equally failed to protect Coptic Egyptians from attacks or prosecute the attackers and deliver justice.” (ibid, p.7)

This report also states:

“Discrimination and attacks against Coptic Christians are particularly prevalent and appear to have worsened since the SCAF assumed power.” (ibid, p.37)

Research compiled by *Refugee Review Tribunal of the Government of Australia* the in July 2011 points out that:

“Reports from a range of sources state that police in Egypt are often slow to react to, or fail to investigate, crimes against Coptic Christians, and that this situation is unchanged in light of the recent political upheaval there.” (Refugee Review Tribunal of the Government of Australia (26 July 2011) *RRT - Egypt – EGY38986 – Coptic Christians – State Protection – Employment*)

This document also notes:

“Sources also report that police and military forces have failed to adequately protect Christians and their property from recent attacks in the post-Mubarak period.” (ibid)

In May 2011 a report published by the *Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights* states:

“The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) issued a report today detailing the findings of a field investigation carried out by its researchers on the sectarian attacks that took place in Imbaba on 7 and 8 May, as a result of which 15 people died and 242 people were injured. The authorities’ response to the attacks reveals the continued failure of the security apparatus to deal with sectarian crises, the report concludes. The police knew in advance that groups of Salafis had assembled in front of the Mar Mina Church in Imbaba, but they failed to anticipate the events—despite evidence suggesting the potential for violence two or more hours before clashes erupted—and in turn failed to prevent the violence.” (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (14 May 2011) *EIPR Releases Findings of Field Investigation into Imbaba Events*)

In June 2011 research carried out *Refugee Review Tribunal of the Government of Australia* by the notes:

“Sources indicate an increase in sectarian violence and attacks since President Hosni Mubarak’s resignation in February, resulting in deaths and injuries. The International Federation for Human Rights, the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights report that police and military forces have failed to adequately protect Christians and their property in the post-Mubarak period.” (Refugee Review Tribunal of the Government of Australia (30 June 2011) *RRT - Egypt – EGY38823 – Coptic Christians – Current Situation – State Protection*)

The *Institute for War & Peace Reporting* in October 2011 states that:

“...with a rise in Islamist movements, many Copts believe the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, SCAF, are not only failing to protect their community but becoming complicit in violence against them - a charge denied by the military.” (Institute for War & Peace Reporting (27 October 2011) *Egyptian Copts See Bleak Future*)

A report issued in May 2011 by the *European Commission* notes:

“Despite the provisions of the Egyptian constitution on freedom of belief, Copts and other non-Muslims continue to face discrimination and inaction from the authorities to effectively ensure the equality of all citizens in law and in practice.” (European Commission (25 May 2011) *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2010; Progress Country Report: Egypt* [SEC (2011) 647, p.6])

A *Human Rights Watch* report in October 2011 states:

“The Egyptian military’s intention to control the investigation of the use of force against unarmed Coptic Christian demonstrators during a night of clashes on October 9, 2011, raises fears of a cover-up, Human Rights Watch said today.” (Human Rights Watch (24 October 2011) *Egypt: Don’t Cover Up Military Killing of Copt Protesters*)

This document also states:

“Egyptian authorities also should look into the underlying causes of the October 9 demonstration and address legitimate grievances by Coptic Christians, Human Rights Watch said. These include discrimination in their right to worship and the failure to punish perpetrators and instigators of attacks on churches and other forms of sectarian violence.” (ibid)

In October 2011 a report published by the *Middle East Report Online* notes:

“October 9 is not, in fact, the first date on which the army has discharged live ammunition at peaceful Coptic demonstrators. In March 2011, soldiers fired upon the garbage collectors of Muqattam, who were protesting the burning of another church in Sol, and other soldiers shot at monks at a monastery in February. The armed forces and transitional government have responded to Islamist attacks on churches and Christian-owned property with a collective shrug, either ignoring the incidents entirely or compounding the injustice by sponsoring "reconciliation committees" administered by salafi leaders whose discourse on non-Muslims in mosques has been deeply disquieting.” (Middle East Report Online (13 October 2011) *Egypt's Bloody Sunday*)

It is also noted in this report that:

“Sectarian violence in Egypt is not new. For the period from January 2008 to January 2010, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) documented 53 cases, in 17 of Egypt's 29 governorates. Most were attacks by groups of Muslims on Christians and Christian churches or property. Most of the attacks, EIPR said, were either assaults on Christians for practicing their religious rites or supposed collective retribution for real or imagined offenses for which the Christian community at large is held responsible.” (ibid)

In November 2011 a report published by the *United States Department of State* notes:

“...the Copts in Egypt have faced discrimination for many years. Christians face personal and collective discrimination, especially in government employment and the ability to build, renovate, and repair places of worship. Although they represent about 10% of the population and play an important role in Egypt's economy, Copts have suffered from widespread discrimination and remain underrepresented in prominent positions in Egyptian politics and society.” (United States Department of State (15 November 2011) *From Arab Spring to Coptic Winter: Sectarian Violence and the Struggle for Democratic Transition in Egypt*)

This document also notes:

“The Coptic community is concerned...about the severity and frequency of sectarian attacks against their community, and while they recognize that the government has nothing to do with most of these attacks, they are greatly concerned about the need to hold perpetrators accountable.” (ibid)

The *Wall Street Journal* in December 2011 states:

“But since the fall of the Mubarak regime in February, the ensuing public security vacuum has allowed acts of violence against Christians to grow, leaving the church politically and socially isolated.” (Wall Street Journal (13 December 2011) *Christians Face Murky Future After Egypt Polls*)

Voice of America in October 2011 states:

“But one of the few things that Egypt's new rulers have changed in the last eight months is to end the suppression of Islamist groups, the more extreme of which have launched attacks on minority Christians.” (Voice of America (11 October 2011) *Anger at Egypt's Military Leaders Grows*)

A report issued in September 2011 by the *United States Department of State* points out that:

“The government failed to prosecute perpetrators of violence against Coptic Christians in a number of cases.” (United States Department of State (13 September 2011) *July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report, Egypt*)

The *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom* in February 2011 notes that:

“For years, the Egyptian government has failed to take sufficient steps to halt the repression of and discrimination against Christians and other religious believers, or, in many cases, to punish those responsible for violence or other severe violations of religious freedom.” (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (22 February 2011) *Egypt: USCIRF Concerned about Acquittals in Sectarian Killings Case*)

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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