



Australian Government

Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Egypt

Egypt – EGY37237 – Cairo – Homosexuals
– Human rights – Coptic Church

27 August 2010

1. Are there any reports of the arrest of 10 men, either a human rights or gay rights group, in February 2006 in Cairo or El Arish?

Mass arrests of gay men and demonstrators in Egypt are generally well documented. There have been no documented arrests of ten gay men or human rights activists in either Cairo or El Arish in February 2006. Indeed, there appear to have been few arrests of gay men by Egyptian police between 2004 and 2007. Human Rights Watch states that in late 2007 Egyptian authorities resumed arresting homosexual men “after a three-year hiatus.”¹

The only demonstrations in January and February 2006 recorded by the US Department of State were a 20 January assembly of Ghad Party supporters outside the Cairo International Stadium and a February demonstration in the port of Safaga “by family members of victims of the February 3 sinking of the Al-Salaam Ferry.” No arrests were made at either demonstration. Rather, the crowds were dispersed with tear gas. The US Department frequently documents the treatment of homosexuals and human rights activists in Egypt.²

Homosexuality is not technically illegal in Egypt. Rather, Egypt outlaws ‘fujur’, described as a term meaning ‘sexual excess’ or ‘debauchery’. According to one source, ‘fujur’ is interpreted by Egyptian courts as meaning or including homosexual acts.³ Consequently, almost all men arrested and sentenced in Egypt for homosexuality are charged with fujur.

With the exception of the so-called three year hiatus, Egyptian authorities have staged mass arrests/sting operations of homosexuals over the past decade. The most infamous such sting was the May 2001 raid on the ‘Queens Boat’, moored on the Nile in Cairo. Fifty two men were arrested in the raid.⁴ Since 2007, Egyptian police have renewed their campaign of arresting men on charges of “habitual practice of debauchery”, a charge described by Amnesty International as one “used to prosecute consensual sexual acts between men.” In October 2007, 24 men were arrested in Cairo and Alexandria on charges of debauchery/fejur. According to Amnesty International, the majority of the men were “forcibly subjected to anal examinations to ‘prove’ that they had engaged in

¹ Human Rights Watch 2009, *Together, Apart: Organizing around Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Worldwide*, May, p.15 – Attachment 1

² US Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006 – Egypt*, 6 March, Section 2.b – Attachment 2

³ Lipson, J. 2007, ‘Human Rights in Egypt: The Gap between Policy and Practice’, *Swords & Ploughshares*, Fall Issue, pp.19-20 <http://www1.sis.american.edu/students/sword/Human%20Rights%20in%20Egypt.pdf> – Accessed 26 August 2010 – Attachment 3

⁴ Bahgat, H. 2001, ‘Explaining Egypt’s Targeting of Gays’, *Middle East Report*, 23 July <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero072301.html> – Accessed 26 August 2010 – Attachment 4

homosexual conduct.” Charges were later dropped for three of the men; however, nine were sentenced to between one and three years in prison. Eleven of the 12 arrested in Alexandria were sentenced to two-years in prison.⁵ More recently, ten men were arrested in Cairo in January 2009 for “habitual practice of debauchery”. According to Amnesty International, the men were detained for five months during investigations before being released on bail. Their trial began in late December 2009.⁶

In 2002 *BBC News* reported that “[h]omosexuality is so detested in Egypt” that the country’s largest rights group [the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights] says it cannot campaign against persecution of gay men despite international concern.” The director of the organisation, Hisham Kassem, is quoted by *BBC News* as asking “[w]hat could we do? Nothing. If we were to uphold this issue, this would be the end of what remains of the concept of human rights in Egypt...” “We let them [homosexuals] down, but I don’t have a mandate from the people, and I don’t want the West to set the pace for the human rights movement in Egypt”.⁷

2. Does the Coptic Christian church deny gay men the right to worship?

While there is no information indicating that the Coptic Church in Egypt actively prevents gay men from attending church/publicly worshipping, there is a substantial body of information demonstrating that the church regularly and vociferously condemns homosexuality in public.

BBC News reports that in August 2003 the Coptic Orthodox Church “issued a formal declaration against homosexuality and same-sex marriage” and that the Church “does not permit the ordination of gay priests.”⁸ *The New York Times* reports that in 1990 Pope Shenouda III, the head of Egypt’s Coptic Orthodox Church, questioned whether homosexuals had any rights.⁹

A gay travel website, GlobalGayz, warns gay travellers that the Coptic Church in Egypt is as ‘stringently’ homophobic as Islam.¹⁰ The GayEgypt website stated in 2003 that Pope Shenouda III had publicly told Egypt’s state-run *Middle East News Agency* that “he supports the government’s efforts to root out the ‘plague’ of homosexuality.” Furthermore, the website reported that Pope Shenouda III was planning to organise “an interfaith summit that will gather the heads of the world’s major religions to combat the growing visibility and social acceptance of gay men and lesbians.”¹¹

⁵ Amnesty International 2009, *Amnesty International Report – Egypt* – Attachment 5

⁶ Amnesty International 2010, *Annual Report 2009*, p.132 – Attachment 6

⁷ ‘Egyptian rights group ‘cannot protect gays’’ 2002, *BBC News*, 11 February <http://www.gayegypt.com/bbc11feb20eg.html> – Accessed 14 July 2005 – Attachment 7

⁸ ‘Coptic Orthodox Church’ 2009, *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 25 June http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/coptic_1.shtml – Accessed 13 January 2010 – Attachment 8

⁹ Azimi, N. ‘Prisoners of Sex’ 2006, *The New York Times*, 3 December <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/03/magazine/03arabs.html?pagewanted=4&th&emc=th> – Accessed 4 December 2006 – Attachment 9

¹⁰ Ammon, R. 2006 ‘Gay Egypt 2004-06: Gay Life (sort of) in Modern Egypt’, GlobalGayz website, March <http://www.globalgayz.com/g-egypt.html> – Accessed 6 June 2007 – Attachment 10

¹¹ ‘Coptic Church joins anti-gay campaign’ 2003, Gay Egypt.com, 10 September <http://www.gayegypt.com/10sep20datlo.html> – Accessed 14 July 2005 – Attachment 11

The Coptic Church's website confirms that during the Church's 2003 Annual Clergy convention "the leaders of the Coptic Orthodox Church discussed recent issues related to homosexuality." According to Copts.net, the convention included Coptic Bishops from North America, Egypt, Australia, Europe and 180 Coptic priests from America, Canada and Australia and was presided by Pope Shenouda III. The site then remarks that "[b]ased on the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, and teachings of the Old and New Testaments, the clergy strongly condemn such activities."¹²

The Religious Tolerance website quotes a 1999 'essay' on homosexuality by Fr. M. Mikhail of the St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Seven Hills, Sydney. In the essay Father Mikhail argues that "[n]o society in history has accepted homosexuality as normal...Nobody is born homosexual...A homosexual orientation can be controlled...One's genes do not determine their sexual 'preference'...Some people become homosexual because of a hostile parent...Others become homosexual by thinking positively about gay/lesbian activity, and experimenting with it" and that "[h]omosexuality is a sin, according to the Bible, Coptic tradition and church creed. It is condemned by God. Sex is only proper between a man and woman who are married to each other."¹³

Attachments

1. Human Rights Watch 2009, *Together, Apart: Organizing around Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Worldwide*, May.
2. US Department of State 2007, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006 – Egypt*, 6 March.
3. Lipson, J. 2007, 'Human Rights in Egypt: The Gap between Policy and Practice', *Swords & Ploughshares*, Fall Issue
<http://www1.sis.american.edu/students/sword/Human%20Rights%20in%20Egypt.pdf> – Accessed 26 August 2010.
4. Bahgat, H. 2001, 'Explaining Egypt's Targeting of Gays', *Middle East Report*, 23 July
<http://www.merip.org/mero/mero072301.html> - Accessed 26 August 2010.
5. Amnesty International 2009, *Amnesty International Report – Egypt*.
6. Amnesty International 2010, *Annual Report 2009*.
7. 'Egyptian rights group 'cannot protect gays'' 2002, *BBC News*, 11 February
<http://www.gayegypt.com/bbc11feb20eg.html> – Accessed 14 July 2005. (CISNET Egypt CX126884)

¹² 'Coptic Orthodox Church formally condemns homosexuality, ordination of homosexuals and same-sex marriage' 2003, Copts.net, 26 August <http://www.copts.net/detail.asp?id=444> – Accessed 14 July 2005 – Attachment 12

¹³ 'The Coptic Orthodox Church and homosexuality' 1999, Religious Tolerance.org, 12 November
http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_copt.htm – Accessed 14 July 2005 – Attachment 13

8. 'Coptic Orthodox Church' 2009, *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 25 June http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/coptic_1.shtml – Accessed 13 January 2010. (CISNET Egypt CX238575)
9. Azimi, N. 'Prisoners of Sex' 2006, *The New York Times*, 3 December <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/03/magazine/03arabs.html?pagewanted=4&th&emc=t> – Accessed 4 December 2006. (CISNET Egypt CX166241)
10. Ammon, R. 2006 'Gay Egypt 2004-06: Gay Life (sort of) in Modern Egypt', GlobalGayz website, March <http://www.globalgayz.com/g-egypt.html> – Accessed 6 June 2007.
11. 'Coptic Church joins anti-gay campaign' 2003, Gay Egypt.com, 10 September <http://www.gayegypt.com/10sep20datlo.html> - Accessed 14 July 2005. (CISNET Egypt CX126872)
12. 'Coptic Orthodox Church formally condemns homosexuality, ordination of homosexuals and same-sex marriage' 2003, Copts.net, 26 August <http://www.copts.net/detail.asp?id=444> – Accessed 14 July 2005. (CISNET Egypt CX126875)
13. 'The Coptic Orthodox Church and homosexuality' 1999, Religious Tolerance.org, 12 November http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_copt.htm – Accessed 14 July 2005. (CISNET Egypt CX126873)