

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

- 1. Please provide information on the history and status of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Egypt.**
- 2. What restrictions or forms of discrimination do they face in practising their religion?**
- 3. How are they treated by members of the community (both Muslims and Copts)?**
- 4. How are they treated by the authorities? Is protection available to them?**

RESPONSE

- 1. Please provide information on the history and status of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Egypt.**

The US Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom* report for Egypt for 2009 states of Jehovah’s Witnesses that:

There are 800 to 1,200 Jehovah’s Witnesses and small numbers of Mormons, but the Government does not recognise either group.

...The Government banned Jehovah’s Witnesses in 1960. Since then it has, to varying degrees, subjected them to harassment and surveillance. The Witnesses were legally registered in Cairo in 1951 and Alexandria in 1956, and their presence in the country dates to the 1930s. The Government attributes its refusal to grant the registration to the Jehovah’s Witnesses to the opposition of the Coptic Orthodox Church, which has condemned the group as heretical, as well as to its lingering Nasser-era suspicion of links between Witnesses and the State of Israel.

...During the reporting period the Government refused the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ continued efforts to be granted legal registration. Representatives from the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ New York headquarters, accompanied by European colleagues, also visited the National Council for Human Rights, the Arab League, and others (see Abuses of Religious Freedom) (US

A July 1996 report from *Compass Direct* provides background information on the history of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt; according to this source, after the banning of the Jehovah's Witnesses in 1960, "All its centres were closed and possessions confiscated. But its members simply went underground":

The Jehovah's Witnesses movement first came to Egypt in 1935, when Benjoti Espiuro Paulo, a Greek servant in an Alexandria tea house, converted to the movement. He and those who followed him encountered strong resistance until Anis Fayed, an employee at the Bank Credit Lyonnais, became their leader.

Subsequently the movement grew quickly, founding centres in all the major cities. From the beginning, the sect focused on converting Christians, although Muslims were also approached.

During the late 1950s, Coptic priest Ibrahim Gabra wrote a series of articles against the activities and beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses, who took him to court in 1958 to try to stop his publications. However, the courts ruled in the case that Gabra's writings were made in defence of his religion and Egyptian national unity.

The government followed up this ruling with Decision 155 on June 2, 1960 which banned the Jehovah's Witnesses movement in Egypt. All its centres were closed and possessions confiscated.

But its members simply went underground. According to two Cairo church leaders, Coptic Catholic Bishop John Kolta and Coptic Orthodox priest Ibrahim Abdel Sid, they are hiding in Protestant churches.

Rev. Gamal Agaiby Kozman, who pastors an Evangelical Church in Cairo's Shubra district, confirmed this. "It is difficult to point to a certain church. Because the movement is forbidden, their members have become in name members of mainly Protestant churches. They have no church building where they can meet, but they come together in closed house meetings," Kozman said ('Jehovah's Witnesses Work Underground in Egypt' 1996, Network for Strategic Missions website, (source: *Compass Direct*), 1 July <https://www.strategicnetwork.org/index.php?loc=kb&view=v&id=442&printerfriendly=Y&lang> – Accessed 4 November 2009 – Attachment 2).

A June 2002 conference paper sourced from the Centre for Studies on New Religions website addresses the position of the small, newer religious communities in Egypt, such as the Baha'i, Ahmadiyyah, and Jehovah's Witnesses. The report suggests that the Egyptian government has been more tolerant of new religious groups which remained "an expat community and didn't recruit new adherents, even in a passive way", but also claims that all new religious communities are "observed by the state security service and attacked by the press in regular intervals". The paper concludes that: "The bans on...the Watchtower society [the Jehovah's Witnesses] are still in force and will certainly not be lifted in the current situation, where each actual or supposed violation of the laws of Islam leads to public outcries and, sometimes, riots":

In the beginning of the 1950s, Jehovah's Witnesses appeared in Egypt and started their committed missionary work, concentrating in the beginning on small Christian denominations like the Greek churches, later on also addressing the Copts.

...For all new religious communities present in Egypt at that time, Nasser's reign constituted a rupture in their development that came fully into effect around the year 1960. In 1960, the Baha'i communities were dissolved by a presidential decree, and the Watchtower society of Egypt suffered the same fate by a ministerial ordinance. The small Ahmadiyya community was observed by the secret service, their Indian missionaries had to leave and they couldn't recruit new adherents any more. These measures were due to Nasser's policy of total government control over religious institutions. Religious communities who seemed too deviant or suspicious to grant them official recognition and incorporate them in the system of state-controlled religious institutions were banned. In this context, the fact that Baha'is and Jehovah's Witnesses, sometimes also Ahmadiyyah, were suspected of having ties to Zionism plays an important role.

...Sadat's infitah or opening policy of the 1970s didn't particularly ease the situation for the banned and non-recognised communities like Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses and Ahmadis, but it helped the Seventh-Day Adventists, who again received support from their General Conference in the US. It also led to the emergence of new groups of Western origin like Mormons or Rosicrucians, who were imported by employees of foreign companies or Egyptians who had studied abroad. However, these groups remained very small and largely unnoticed. They received clear signals from the government indicating that their existence would be tolerated as long as they stayed an expat community and didn't recruit new adherents, even in a passive way. For this reason, those groups still mainly consist of foreigners and have usually less than 100 members. The Ahmadiyya community has about the same size; of their 70 or so members, about half are Egyptians, most of them from a few families. The Egyptian Adventists number a bit less than 1000 in about 20 churches, mostly in Cairo and Upper Egypt. The Baha'i community and the one of Jehovah's Witnesses probably have several thousand members each; estimates vary considerably.

...In the years since 1988, when the Baha'is arrested in 1985 were acquitted, the situation of some new religious communities in Egypt has improved a little. The Adventists have in spite of the Coptic church's fierce opposition obtained the right to conclude marriages, which they had had to delegate to priests of other Protestant denominations before. Jehovah's Witnesses have cautiously started their missionary work again in the 1990s; arrests of Jehovah's Witnesses have been unheard of since the end of Nasser's reign. Still, all new religious communities, and especially Baha'i Faith, are confronted with serious problems in the fields of civil and administrative law. They are observed by the state security service and attacked by the press in regular intervals. The bans on Baha'i communities and the Watchtower society are still in force and will certainly not be lifted in the current situation, where each actual or supposed violation of the laws of Islam leads to public outcries and, sometimes, riots (Pink, J. 2002, 'New religious communities in Egypt – Islam, public order and freedom of belief', Centre for Studies on New Religions website, June <http://www.cesnur.org/2002/slc/pink.htm> – Accessed 4 November 2009 – Attachment 4).

A report from the Egyptian National Council for Human Rights, dated 13 July 2009, notes that the Egyptian "community considers them [the Jehovah's Witnesses] to be Zionists":

The delegation discussed the principles of Jehovah's Witnesses beliefs and their current status in Egypt; this status is facing many problems because of the non-acceptance they are exposed to from the community and especially from the Orthodox Church. The community considers them to be Zionists, thus violating the principles of human rights, which is ultimately leading to the hindering of their principal rights.

Dr. Kamal Abu El Maged asserted that the NCHR is ready to make efforts to change this image towards the government authorities; he also asserted that the NCHR respects the God's religions and the freedom of belief. The council also agreed with the delegation on the importance of correcting the image of the Jehovah's Witnesses and stressing that they have no

relations with global Zionism or the State of Israel ('The Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt' 2009, National Council for Human Rights website, 13 July <http://www.nchr.org.eg/index.php/en/press-releases/89-2009-07-13-09-10-27> – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 3).

An article sourced from the Evangelical Church in Egypt website, titled 'Freedom of religion in Egypt' claims that small, officially unrecognised religious communities such as the Jehovah's Witnesses "do have the right to practice their religion, but their practice should not be offensive to one of the officially recognised communities. This means in practice they can hardly go public with their activities":

The discussion about freedom of religion is very different in Egypt from that in the West. Westerners are focused on the freedom of individuals. Egyptians, Muslims and Christians, are focused on what they believe is good for their community; the protection of their traditions and faith. Both Muslims and Christians make all efforts to have the government on their side. Christians need to protect their community from, for example the preaching of Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims to prevent, for example, the Baha'is from being recognised.

...Religious communities that are not officially recognised by the Egyptian authorities such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Baha'is do have the right to practice their religion, but their practice should not be offensive to one of the officially recognised communities. This means in practice that they hardly can go public with their activities (Hulsman, C. (undated), 'Freedom of religion in Egypt', Evangelical Church in Egypt website http://www.ekd.de/english/1720-ekd_text78_2engl.html – Accessed 4 November 2009 – Attachment 5).

Anecdotal information sourced from a blog website run by a Jehovah's Witness from the US, dated 15 October 2009 reports on a conversation with a leading Jehovah's Witnesses figure who claims that, as a result of recent meetings in Egypt, Egyptian Jehovah's Witnesses "are now allowed to witness to 'coptic christians'" [*sic*], but that: "Witnessing to Muslims is still illegal". This source also claims that Jehovah's Witnesses "may now meet as congregations" of up to thirty members in Egypt (see Question 4 below for the 2009 US Department of State *International Religious Freedom* report which also makes this claim):

In the country of Egypt, the legal dept. for years have been working to ease the restrictions against Jehovah's Witnesses and our ministry there. The majority of Egyptians are muslim although there are a number of "coptic christians" in the country. Representatives of the Patterson legal dept. recently visited with legal representatives in Egypt. We were shown photos of their visit. One photo was of the brothers as they were meeting with Mr. Boutros-boutros-ghali the one-time Secretary General of the United Nations. He is now a political influence in Egypt. He is also a "coptic christian". As a result of the meeting we are now allowed to witness to "coptic christians". Witnessing to muslims is still considered illegal. Before the meeting we were only allowed to meet in groups of five, but now we can meet in groups of thirty, which means that now we can meet as congregations. We enjoyed photos of the legal brothers with two of the congregations. Jehovah's Witnesses are not yet recognised as a religion in Egypt, but Jehovah and the legal dept. are continually working to change that ('Legal Victories – very encouraging report 2009' 2009, Tracy's Site blog website, 15 October <http://tracymuck.com/main/news.php?item.1410.11> – Accessed 4 November 2009 – Attachment 6).

3. How are they treated by members of the community (both Muslims and Copts)?

Little information was located regarding the attitude of the Muslim community in Egypt toward the Jehovah's Witnesses; the available information reports that the Coptic Church and its Patriarch Pope Shenouda III are publicly negative toward the movement.

A report from the Adventist News Network website, dated January 2003, stated that "Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt" criticised Jehovah's Witnesses as "unity disturbers" in Egypt:

In a television interview with Egyptian TV on Jan. 7, Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt said that Christians and Muslims are united in Egypt, but that Seventh-day Adventists, along with others, are disturbing the unity in the country.

Emphasising his love for Muslims, Shenouda also listed as unity disturbers Jehovah's Witnesses and American Jews ('Egypt: Coptic Pope Publicly Insults Seventh-day Adventist Church' 2003, Adventist News Network, 14 January <http://news.adventist.org/2003/01/egypt-coptic-pope-publicly-insults-seventh-day-adventist-church.html?print=1> – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 7).

In July 2002, a report from *Worldwide Religious News* (sourced from *Associated Press*) stated that Pope Shenouda III "criticised the Jehovah's Witness faith", and that the Coptic Patriarch also claimed that "Jehovah's Witnesses have been rejected by all Christian groups":

The head of the Coptic Orthodox Church criticised the Jehovah's Witness faith and said a Copt's conversion to the sect was a ground for divorce, Egypt's Middle East News Agency reported on Friday.

Pope Shenouda III said conversion to the Jehovah's Witness faith was a ground for divorce within his church. The only other ground for divorce is adultery.

The Coptic church allows people of other Christian denominations to intermarry, but disapproves of their divorce, which still can be achieved if taken to the courts.

...Speaking in his weekly lecture, the 78-year old patriarch said Jehovah's Witnesses have been active in Egypt for years and have grown more active recently. The faith is "independent and unrelated to all the monotheistic religions," MENA reported him as saying.

"Jehovah's Witnesses have been rejected by all Christian groups," he added ('Pope Shenouda warns Copts that marriage with Jehovah's Witnesses is ground for excommunication, divorce' 2002, *Worldwide Religious News*, (source: AP), 19 July <http://www.wwrn.org/article.php?idd=10757&sec=19&cont=3> – Accessed 4 November 2009 – Attachment 8).

The Coptic Patriarch has also published a collection of articles (last revised in 1997) entitled *The Heresy of Jehovah's Witnesses*, in which he asserts that "Jehovah's Witnesses are not Christians" and that: "Many governments have expelled Jehovah's Witnesses from their countries because they sensed the danger which they presented to the country's general peace":

Jehovah's Witnesses are not Christians. Although they believe in the New Testament, it is their own incorrect translation that is misconstrued to suit their beliefs. They do not call themselves Christians, but 'Jehovah's Witnesses' – 'Jehovah' being a name of God used in the Old Testament. Their doctrine regarding the Lord Jesus Christ is completely different to

the Christian doctrine; it is a mixture of the heresy of Arius, and other new heresies. They have even reached a level much worse than that of Arius by far. Many governments have expelled Jehovah's Witnesses from their countries because they sensed the danger which they presented to the country's general peace. Therefore, it can be said that they do not only propagate false religious beliefs, but they also propagate dangerous political ideas. As they say that the Church is a product of the devil, they also say that governments are a product of the devil, and encourage people not to enter the armed forces. They also consider saluting the flag as idolatry. Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe in the immortality of the soul and say that this is the teaching of the devil (Pope Shenouda III 1997, *The Heresy of Jehovah's Witnesses* (A collection of articles published in 'El-Keraza' English Magazine), Tasbeha.org website http://tasbeha.org/content/hh_books/jehovwit/index.html – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 9).

The abovementioned July 1996 report from *Compass Direct* states of Jehovah's Witnesses that "Muslims claim not to be that troubled by their hidden presence, even though they generally consider them to be anti-Islamic". This report also provides details of the negative attitude of the Coptic clergy to the Jehovah's Witnesses:

Egypt's Christians, however, consider Jehovah's Witnesses to be a threat, since their evangelistic activities often target church members or nominal Christian populations without any church.

... "We warn our people in church against the Jehovah's Witnesses," Father Marcos stressed. "His Holiness Pope Shenouda [leader of the Coptic Orthodox community] published some brochures about their thoughts, which we use in our churches for discussions with our youth."

In Cairo, Father Ibrahim has also had experiences with the sect in his congregation. "They misuse the ignorance of people they approach, and the differences between churches," he said. "They visit nominal Christians and are especially active in Cairo's slums. They still use the books that were forbidden in 1960."

Father Ibrahim believes their apparent success stems from taking people abroad for training as Jehovah's Witnesses missionaries.

"They take girls with them during visits to families, and not only speak about their faith, but also about money, traveling and marriage. Marriage is used to win young people to them," he stated. "In our society, where it is almost impossible to marry without a furnished flat and a good job, such an offer is very tempting."

But even more worrisome to Father Ibrahim is their theology. "In families they visit, they say they are in favour of freedom of religion. But they deny Jesus' resurrection and the existence of the Holy Spirit," he said.

In addition, the priest said, "They believe the world was given to Satan after the death of the disciples. They claim the church was created by Satan."

In surveying a number of church leaders, it was apparent that the cult has focused its activities in areas where Christians live but the church is weak.

Father Tadrous of Alexandria declared he had noticed no sign of their activities in central Alexandria. "In areas where the church is active, the Jehovah's Witnesses have no chance," the priest said. "The best protection is good Biblical education" ('Jehovah's Witnesses Work Underground in Egypt' 1996, Network for Strategic Missions website, (source: *Compass Direct*), 1 July

<https://www.strategicnetwork.org/index.php?loc=kb&view=v&id=442&printerfriendly=Y&lang> – Accessed 4 November 2009 – Attachment 2).

**2. What restrictions or forms of discrimination do they face in practising their religion?
4. How are they treated by the authorities? Is protection available to them?**

The US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom* report for Egypt for 2009 claims that since the Jehovah's Witnesses were banned in 1960, the government has "to varying degrees, subjected them to harassment and surveillance". The report notes claims of official harassment of individual Jehovah's Witnesses, the confiscation of Bibles and literature, and the monitoring of "homes, telephones, and meeting places of Jehovah's Witnesses". Nonetheless, the report notes "some improvements" in conditions for Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt, as "senior international Witness leaders believed that their engagement with the Government over the past three years concerning their request for official recognition had resulted in diminished harassment and hostile surveillance":

The Government banned Jehovah's Witnesses in 1960. Since then it has, to varying degrees, subjected them to harassment and surveillance.

...Jehovah's Witness leadership reported regular Government harassment and interrogation of Witnesses during the reporting period and efforts to induce some into becoming informers. State security officers reportedly threatened several witnesses that harassment would revert to former elevated levels if they refused to cooperate by providing information including the identity and activities of Witnesses, including those who conduct baptisms. Authorities also reportedly confiscated literature and personal Bibles from visiting foreign Witnesses. State security authorities reportedly monitored the homes, telephones, and meeting places of Jehovah's Witnesses. According to senior international Witness leadership, however, there were some improvements, including permission for groups of up to 30 to meet, and a cessation of harassment of Witnesses in Alexandria since May 2008. They previously reported that at least three Witnesses were beaten while in police custody in 2007. Jehovah's Witnesses have reported varying degrees of harassment and surveillance by government agents since 1960, but senior international Witness leaders believed that their engagement with the Government over the past three years concerning their request for official recognition had resulted in diminished harassment and hostile surveillance (US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Egypt*, 26 October – Attachment 1).

The abovementioned National Council for Human Rights report from July 2009 reports on a recent "decrease of the pressure exerted by the authorities against Jehovah's Witnesses, especially in the Alexandria governorate" ('The Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt' 2009, National Council for Human Rights website, 13 July <http://www.nchr.org.eg/index.php/en/press-releases/89-2009-07-13-09-10-27> – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 3).

The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies stated in an August 2008 submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council that the lack of official recognition of groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses "is often used in Egypt as a means to deny and withhold state protection to members":

7. The term "divine religions" (*al-adyaan al samaawiyya*), is often used in Egypt as a means to deny and withhold state protection to members of other religious minorities that do not fall under, or are deliberately excluded from, the three Abrahamic religions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. The fourth annual report of the State-affiliated National Council for Human Rights documents state-sponsored religious discrimination against followers of the Baha'i

faith and members of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Both groups are not officially recognised as religious sects in Egypt (Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies 2008, 'Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance, Follow-Up and Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action', European Country of Origin Information Service website, (source: UN Human Rights Council), 29 August http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1227_1225896113_egypt.pdf – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 10).

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Annual Report, from May 2009, states that: "Serious problems of discrimination, intolerance, and other human rights violations against members of religious minorities...remain widespread in Egypt". The report further claims that: "The government has not taken sufficient steps to halt the repression of and discrimination against religious believers...or, in many cases, to punish those responsible for violence or other severe violations of religious freedom". Of the Jehovah's Witnesses, the report states that: "After a period of improved conditions and a significant decrease in harassment and abuse by government officials in 2006, the number of interrogations by Egypt's state security services of Jehovah's Witnesses increased in 2007 and 2008"; and that "one member of the state security services in Cairo increasingly has used intimidation and threats of physical abuse to extract information about co-religionists":

...there was increased public space to discuss and debate a wide range of religious freedom concerns in the media and other public fora, which, in previous years, was discouraged and prevented by Egyptian authorities. Nevertheless, due to persistent, serious concerns, Egypt remains on the Commission's Watch List and the situation will continue to be monitored to determine if it rises to a level that warrants designation as a "country of particular concern", or CPC.

Egypt has a poor overall human rights record, including repressive practices that seriously violate freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief.

...Human rights organisations inside the country are concerned that Islamist extremism continues to advance in Egypt, with detrimental effects on the prospects for democratic reform, religious tolerance, and the rights of women, girls, and members of religious minorities. Some believe that the government is not acting to counteract this problem, especially in the areas of public education and the media, where extremist influence is growing.

...Members of Egypt's non-Muslim religious minorities, particularly Christians and Baha'is, report discrimination, interference, harassment, and surveillance by the Egyptian state security services.

...Violent attacks on Christian communities over the years have resulted in very few prosecutions, including the 2004 Court of Cassation decision to uphold the acquittal of 94 of 96 persons suspected of involvement in the killing of 21 Christians in Al-Kosheh in late 1999 and early 2000. Some Egyptian human rights advocates believe that Egyptian authorities should investigate claims of police negligence and inadequate prosecution of those involved in this violence.

...Although neither the Constitution nor the Penal Code prohibits proselytising or conversion, the State Department has observed that the Egyptian government uses Article 98(f) of the Penal Code to prosecute any alleged proselytising by non-Muslims. Known converts from Islam to Christianity generally receive scrutiny from the state security services; most conversions therefore are done privately.

...After several years of close surveillance, authorities increased repressive measures in late 2005 and early 2006 against the small community of Jehovah's Witnesses, who are not recognised by the Egyptian government. After a period of improved conditions and a significant decrease in harassment and abuse by government officials in 2006, the number of interrogations by Egypt's state security services of Jehovah's Witnesses increased in 2007 and 2008. In particular, one member of the state security services in Cairo increasingly has used intimidation and threats of physical abuse to extract information about co-religionists. Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt continued to pursue legal recognition but have not made any significant progress with Egyptian authorities in the past year ('Egypt' 2009, in *Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*, USCIRF website, May <http://www.uscifr.gov/images/AR2009/final%20ar2009%20with%20cover.pdf> – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 11).

A statement made before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus of the United States House of Representatives in November 2005, sourced from the US Copts website, also claims that "Jehovah's Witnesses...have reported harassment and abuse by government authorities":

After several years of close surveillance, authorities reportedly have increased repressive measures in the last year against the small community of Jehovah's Witnesses, who are not recognised by the Egyptian government. Jehovah's Witnesses also have reported harassment and abuse by government authorities ('Remarks by Commissioner Elizabeth Prodromou: Briefing on "Religious Freedom in Egypt" Before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus of the United States House of Representatives' 2005, US Copts website, 16 November <http://www.copts.com/english/?p=383> – Accessed 4 November 2009 – Attachment 12).

The Second Quarterly Report of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, from July 2008, notes the arrest of three Russians in June 2008 "on charges of distributing Arabic-language flyers and magazines proselytising for the Jehovah's Witnesses":

Press reports indicate that State Security Investigation officers in Sharm al-Sheikh arrested three Russians in June 2008 on charges of distributing Arabic-language flyers and magazines proselytising for the Jehovah's Witnesses, which is not recognised as a Christian confession under Egyptian law. EIPR researchers could obtain no additional information about the incident (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2008, 'Freedom of Religion and Belief in Egypt, Second Quarterly Report, April-June 2008', EIPR website, July http://www.eipr.org/en/reports/FRB_quarterly_rep_jul08_en/Second%20quarterly%20Report%20on%20FRB.pdf – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 13).

September 2008 information sourced from the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (DFAT) notes that there is little coverage of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the Egyptian media; that "Post is not aware of any examples of mistreatment, or state sanctioned or systematic discrimination"; that: "any proselytising by Jehovah's Witnesses would be aimed at other Christians denominations, rather than Muslims. It is highly unlikely that this would concern the government"; and that: "much of the government's opposition is based on the opposition of the Coptic Orthodox Church":

QUESTIONS: [27/08/08]

Q.1. Does the post have information on the treatment of members of the Jehovah's Witness faith by the greater community? Is the post aware of any examples of mistreatment?

Q.2. Does the post have information on the Egyptian government's attitude/law regarding proselytising of the Jehovah's Witness faith?

Q3. Is the post aware of any other information regarding mistreatment, discrimination or abuse suffered by members of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt?

RESPONSES: [08/09/08]

R.1. Post has encountered no coverage of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Egyptian media, including in state-owned, independent and Christian publications, or through NGO and human rights contacts. Incidents of sectarian conflict (usually between Muslims and Coptic Christians) generally attract wide-spread media coverage in Egypt.

Post is not aware of any examples of mistreatment, or state sanctioned or systematic discrimination.

R.2. In Egypt, the three officially recognised faiths are Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Jehovah's Witnesses are treated by the government as Christians. According to anecdotal evidence, any proselytising by Jehovah's Witnesses would be aimed at other Christians denominations, rather than Muslims. It is highly unlikely that this would concern the government.

R.3. The US State Department Religious Freedom reports contain information regarding specific instances of mistreatment and discrimination suffered by members of the Jehovah's Witness faith in Egypt: that the Jehovah's Witness faith has been banned in Egypt since 1960; that much of the government's opposition is based on the opposition of the Coptic Orthodox Church; and that senior international Witness leadership believed that their engagement of the government over the past two years concerning their request for official recognition had resulted in a cessation of the policy of harassment and hostile surveillance (Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade 2008, *Egypt: Treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses – Country Information Report No. 08/87*, 9 September – Attachment 14).

List of Sources Consulted

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Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au>

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FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. US Department of State 2009, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2009 – Egypt*, 26 October.
2. 'Jehovah's Witnesses Work Underground in Egypt' 1996, Network for Strategic Missions website, (source: *Compass Direct*), 1 July
<https://www.strategicnetwork.org/index.php?loc=kb&view=v&id=442&printerfriendly=Y&lang> – Accessed 4 November 2009.

3. 'The Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt' 2009, National Council for Human Rights website, 13 July <http://www.nchr.org.eg/index.php/en/press-releases/89-2009-07-13-09-10-27> – Accessed 28 October 2009.
4. Pink, J. 2002, 'New religious communities in Egypt – Islam, public order and freedom of belief', Centre for Studies on New Religions website, June <http://www.cesnur.org/2002/slc/pink.htm> – Accessed 4 November 2009.
5. Hulsman, C. (undated), 'Freedom of religion in Egypt', Evangelical Church in Egypt website http://www.ekd.de/english/1720-ekd_text78_2engl.html – Accessed 4 November 2009.
6. 'Legal Victories – very encouraging report 2009' 2009, Tracy's Site blog website, 15 October <http://tracymuck.com/main/news.php?item.1410.11> – Accessed 4 November 2009.
7. 'Egypt: Coptic Pope Publicly Insults Seventh-day Adventist Church' 2003, Adventist News Network, 14 January <http://news.adventist.org/2003/01/egypt-coptic-pope-publicly-isults-seveth-ay-avetist-church.html?print=1> – Accessed 28 October 2009.
8. 'Pope Shenouda warns Copts that marriage with Jehovah's Witnesses is ground for excommunication, divorce' 2002, *Worldwide Religious News*, (source: AP), 19 July <http://www.wwrn.org/article.php?idd=10757&sec=19&cont=3> – Accessed 4 November 2009.
9. Pope Shenouda III 1997, *The Heresy of Jehovah's Witnesses (A collection of articles published in 'El-Keraza' English Magazine)*, Tasbeha.org website http://tasbeha.org/content/hh_books/jehovwit/index.html – Accessed 28 October 2009.
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