Persecution of Coptic Christians in Modern Egypt

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Abstract

The Christian community of Egypt dates back to the seventeenth century and comprises 12 per cent of the population today. As one of the oldest churches of the world, the Coptic Christian Church, first formed in Alexandria, has stood resilient and faithful to its traditions against intolerance, siege and persecutions. Having been present in most institutions of the state among the overwhelmingly Sunni-Muslim population, Copts are not new to the slow process of Islamization that Egypt has been undergoing for the last twenty years. What has been unique to the recent Coptic experience is the forced integration of Shari'a law by organized, violent fundamentalist groups—such as the Muslim Brotherhood. These groups have permeated political and social aspects of life, creating the worst suffering in Coptic modern history according to the Church. Dismissed as episodic, the state is unresponsive to the persistent violence and discrimination against Christians voiced daily.

Keywords

Human rights, Egypt, Religious persecution, Coptic Christians, Islam

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Persecution of Coptic Christians in Modern Egypt
By Alla Rubinstein

The Christian community of Egypt dates back to the seventeenth century and comprises 12 per cent of the population today. As one of the oldest churches of the world, the Coptic Christian Church, first formed in Alexandria, has stood resilient and faithful to its traditions against intolerance, siege and persecutions. Having been present in most institutions of the state among the overwhelmingly Sunni-Muslim population, Copts are not new to the slow process of Islamization that Egypt has been undergoing for the last twenty years. What has been unique to the recent Coptic experience is the forced integration of Shari'a law by organized, violent fundamentalist groups— such as the Muslim Brotherhood. These groups have permeated political and social aspects of life, creating the worst suffering in Coptic modern history according to the Church. Dismissed as episodic, the state is unresponsive to the persistent violence and discrimination against Christians voiced daily.

Fitna ta-ifiyya, or sectarian tensions, have digressed from historical peaceful coexistence to stereotyping and ostracization of Copts by the Muslim community. The US State Department notes in a recent report that religious freedom is deteriorating throughout Egypt and human rights violations, including discrimination, abuse, imprisonment, and violence, have risen significantly. A great grievance of the Coptic minority is that they hold few positions in national government and no high-ranking posts as governors, mayors, or police chiefs to oppose parties who claim that the Quran is their constitution. Political Islam has been an influential factor in the sociopolitical scene, its agenda being pushed into professional circles, including university posts, military activities, and the media. Citizens have taken politics to the streets in an attempt to restrict public influence in the government sphere. In turn, government edicts have permeated daily life by restricting organization of civil society, freedom of press, and political activism such as the *kefaya* movement. A strict divide between Islamist ideals and secular intellectualism has marginalized Christians from government participation as they display a preference for Western principles. While Copts are generally able to practice their faith and fall under the status of *dhimmis* ('protected people'), they do so in constant fear. As religious identity is a social marker, Christians are easily targeted in their communities as "infidels." Identification cards and birth certificates indicate the religion of the holder to display their status. The burning of churches, such as the 2008 attack in Matariya, Cairo, prohibition of apostasy punishable by death, and indiscriminate murder of Christians has evoked a desperate plea from the Official Coptic Church for liberalization, reform, and the removal of the age-old edict, *Hatti Humayun,* which has limited equal rights of Christians since the Ottoman Empire.

Although freedom of belief and the practice of religious rite are lawful under Article 46 of the Constitution, discrimination and oppression against Christians have been persistent on several levels of political powers. Bureaucratic delays and restrictions have been set by the government to uphold Islam, the official state religion, in order to stave off threats the republic has been facing from opposition groups who seek an Islamist nation. For example, authorities detained and harassed converts from Islam to Christianity, insisting they convert back, claiming that the constitution did not extend to apostates. Complaints of failure to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of sectarian violence fall on deaf ears as President Mubarak's regime denies these breaches, casting

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them off as isolated situations. Parallel to government non-compliance, radical opposition groups have violently oppressed non-believers, particularly Christians, who do not agree with fundamentalism and political Islam. The Muslim Brotherhood, officially banned by Egypt in 1954, and other Islamic extremist groups such as Gama Islamiyya, the Islamic Brigades of Pride, Abdulla Azzam Brigades, and Al-Qaeda, have committed bombings and terrorist acts on tourist locations such as the Red Sea Resort. This has been in an attempt to destabilize the Egyptian government, hopefully affording them the opportunity to install a full-impact Islamist regime. In its effort to maintain power, the government under President Mubarak often ignores Islamist groups' violent activities against non-Muslim individuals in an attempt to placate the violence and to conserve the little balance remaining between secular and Islamist groups. On a local level, police are often complicit in mistreatment of Copts as they are members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Opportunities to seek aid and restitution against perpetrators of crimes against Copts are small and few resources allow for victims to report abuses.

Backed by Article Two of the Egyptian Constitution, most government policies are dictated by Islamic jurisprudence. Outstanding public legal predicaments for Copts have appeared in recent apostasy cases, where local police detain and harass converts from Islam to Christianity. Most recently, the Egyptian Islamic Legislation Authority has been issuing a greater number of *fatwas*, or legal Islamic pronouncements, to restrict the actions of Christians, as they are inconsistent with the faith of Islam. On September 1, 2009, the Egypt Muslim Council issued a *fatwa* against the building of a church calling it a "sin against God." Similar *fatwas* have been passed by high Sheikhs forbidding anyone from participating in Christmas celebrations, distributing non-Muslim pamphlets, and from converting from Islam to Christianity. Family law affecting child rights, inheritance, marriage rights, and burial is dictated by Shari'a as well, prescribing harsher sentences and fewer privileges to non-Muslims and overriding canon law. In 2003, the Ministry of Justice authorized the confiscation of materials deemed to be inconsistent with Islamic law. Also, although under Presidential Decree 291 churches are able to expand or build under the consent of a governor, the permit process is often delayed by government stalling, or denied and made impossible, leaving many monastic establishments to function illegally.

According to a poll by the New York Times in 2009, more young people are feeling disenfranchised and falling into the arms of religious committees wanting to oversee all matters of state governed by Islamic law. Trends of increased visibility of public incidents of sectarian violence against Copts, such as the murder of six Coptic Christians on Christmas Eve 2009, are getting more people to take note of the gravity of the escalating sectarian tensions in Egypt. The international community is becoming more aware of the Coptic struggles and is calling for accountability by the Egyptian government. Since the return of Coptic Pope Shendouda III from exile, internal church organizations are gaining a platform to seek out global support. Also, the role of monastic and social services are increasing. Coptic intellectuals have sought means of addressing discrimination but have emigrated due to the dismaying negative response. As a result, advocates for Coptic rights are pushing for stronger international involvement to ameliorate their plight and regain their presence in modern Egypt.

Annotations

Al Imrani, Issander. 2006. "The Emergence of the Coptic Question in Egypt." *Ikhwanweb: The Muslim Brotherhood's Official English Web Site.* Available online: http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=4326.

Annotation: Written for the Muslim Brotherhood's Official website, this article has a definite bias regarding the events following the first degree murder by a Muslim of three parishioners and several worshippers at a Coptic church in Egypt. Although acknowledging the crime and outrage from both the Muslim and Christian communities, the article depicts Christians as an angry mob slandering Islam. The author shatters the government's notion of "national unity" by recounting a long year of events in 2005 when Muslim-Coptic relations deteriorated due primarily to controversies over religious conversions. Though important for acknowledging a fundamentalist perspective, this article nonetheless accuses US media, the Egyptian state, and secularism of spreading conspiracies and myths about the current state of affairs for minorities in Egypt.

Al-Tamimi, A. J. 2010. "How the Mubarak Regime Enables the Persecution of Egypt's Copts, a briefing by Magdi Khalil." Middle East Freedom Forum. Available online: http://www.meforum.org/2599/egypt-persecution-of-copts.

Annotation: As a renowned human rights activist in the Middle East, Khalil gives a diatribe on the abuses of the Mubarak regime against Coptic Christians. Kahlil says that the subjugation of Christians is inevitable in a country where "state crimes" are mandated by Shari'a law. Khalil chastises the Egyptian government for being just behind Iran and Saudi Arabia in human rights violations. Khalil's speech is monumental in that it bluntly reveals to the Middle East public the ongoing hate crimes occurring in Egypt, such as the abduction of Coptic girls who are raped and forced to convert to Islam. He calls on Copts and the United States to fight these crimes as he sees Christians as the only ones who can uphold secularism in Egypt and halt injustice. Very brief and concise, Kahlil leaves the reader with a strong feeling of desperation for the plight of the Copts.

Ansari, Hamied. 1984. "Sectarian conflict in Egypt and the Political Expediency of Religion." *Middle East Journal* 38, (3): 397-418.

Annotation: This article violates a social taboo in Egypt by openly discussing conflicts between Muslims and Coptic Christians. The author dissects the different groups and associations that have weakened the bond between the two religions, and have in effect destabilized the unity of the political state. Ansari examines how the appeal to religion by Egyptian authorities weakened the nation's policies on sensitive topics such as conversion, the rise of Islamic militancy, and sectarian disturbances. Based on the sectarian tensions, Ansari concludes that the return of the Wafd political party will likely lead to greater polarization with decreased liberalization. This

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source provides a linear chronology of political tensions in both Egyptian politics and religious movements, drawing a sequential parallel of events.

Arzt, Donna E. 1996. "Religious human rights in Muslim states of the Middle East and North Africa," in John Witte, Jr. and Johan D. van der Vyver (eds.), Religious Human Rights in Global Perspectives - Religious Perspectives, 387-454. Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

Annotation: The author presents a broad picture of predominantly religious-based human rights law in Muslim states. Because Shari'a law, derived from the Quran and Hadith, is generally consistent across Muslim nations, the general impression allows readers to grasp the language of national constitutions through an Islamic lens. The author introduces non-binding bodies of law such as the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (1990) which exclude non-Muslims from attaining basic liberties and the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (1981) which breaches the topic of non-Muslim rights. The article emphasizes the "radically different consciousness" of human rights in the Muslim community as opposed to Western societies, but refuses to accept that international human rights norms are not compatible with Muslim beliefs. Rather, through legal clarification, the author exposes the inconsistencies of Muslim legislation that stifles free expression under a religious pretext.

Ascott, Jackie. 2010. "Copts Through the Ages." In *Cop Net* [database online]. Available online: http://www.coptic.net/articles/CoptsThroughTheAges.txt.

Annotation: This article provides a brief yet complete history of the waves of peace and repression of Coptic Christians throughout the ages. Succinct and direct, this article makes it possible to visualize the highs and lows of Coptic history and the origin of its conservative doctrine. No current details are presented for recent trends of Copts in Egypt, but the historical importance of the Coptic Church of Alexandria and the land presently defining Egypt is underscored. Ascott demonstrates why the land is holy to the religion and how its significance has withstood centuries of instability for the sake of remaining true to the Apostolic doctrine.

Bandow, Doug. 2010. "Interfaith dialogue: The Great Unmentionable." In *CATO Institute* [database online]. Available online: http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=10215.

Annotation: This op-ed piece reviews the general sentiment of Islamic nations with regard to minority religions in the Middle East. The author reviews actions taken by several country leaders such as Turkey's Tayyip Erdogan and the Organization of the Islamic Conference to combat religious persecution. The author points to the need for Islamic nations to take urgent measures to promote tolerance and change the global perspective that Islam connotes human rights violations and intolerance. As a comparative analysis of how Muslim nations are responding to dealing with religious minority issues, this article provides a thorough examination of previous dialogues and the future conversations necessary to push for the promotion of human rights in the Middle East.

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Berger, Maurits S. 2003. "Apostasy and Public Policy in Contemporary Egypt: An Evaluation of Recent Cases from Egypt's Highest Courts." *Human Rights Quarterly* (25): 720-740.

Annotation: The author interprets Egyptian case law on apostasy in the context of the case of Muslim scholar, Nasr Abu Zayd, whose marriage and inheritance rights were involved in the ruling. Citing specific family laws and court rulings, Berger scrutinizes the consequences of apostasy, making careful distinctions between apostasy and conversion using the jargon of the courts under Islamic law. Because no statutory law exists, each trial is handled by case law, which paints a consistent picture of the act deserving a death sentence. The depiction here is dire for apostates who face harsh consequences for abandoning Islam and persuasive for others to avoid conversion. With a perplexed tone, the author seeks to uncover how the public policy acts consistently with popular belief and if, in fact, the death penalty is the appropriate legal consequence under Egyptian law.

Boles, Imda. 2001. "Egypt – Persecution." *The Middle East Quarterly: Special Edition - Disappearing Christians of the Middle East.*8 (1): 23-29.

Annotation: The author exposes the current state of Coptic Christians as a minority group in Egypt and the various paths they are forced to take due to the burgeoning religious repression of the state. The reading provides a well-rounded review of the history, statistics, and political limitations and dismal affairs restricting Christian rights in the region. The author calls on the United States to step forward as the leader in ensuring the human rights and freedoms of Christians by putting pressure on Egyptian officials and encouraging UN responsibility. As the chairman of the British Coptic Association, the author speaks to an American audience on behalf of his group to demand assistance in emancipating Coptic Christians from a repressive regime.

Brown II, Scott Kent. 2000. "Coptic church in Egypt: A Comment on Protecting Religious Minorities from Nonstate Discrimination." *BYU Legal Review* 3: 1049-1098.

Annotation: In light of recent cries from the Coptic Church of Egypt against religious persecution by the government, Brown reviews the government's rebuttal against this claim by analyzing the historical presence of Copts in civil life. Section III of this article critiques Egypt's role and responsibilities based on international human tights standards towards religious pluralism. Brown reviews the country's relationship with religion from a human rights perspective, evaluating the effectiveness of its interactions with the UDHR and CCPR. This is a helpful article for anyone seeking to understand Egypt's response to international accusations against human rights abuses and for a better understanding of what a country's responsibilities are within the human rights framework.

Cragg, Kenneth. 1991. <u>The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East</u>. Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press.

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Annotation: Although written over twenty years ago, Cragg's analysis of Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt is still very relevant for assessing the current Coptic Christians' rights. The final chapter prescribes a dismal view of Muslim-Christian coexistence that lies beyond anyone's control, and offers more dilemmas than it attempts to resolve. The book focuses on contemporary Arab and Christian identities and makes broad comparisons of Copts to Christians in other Middle Eastern societies, such as Lebanon. The author allots an entire chapter on ascertaining why Christianity can share no future with Islam due to the political nature of Islam and the powerlessness of Christians in the Muslim world. There is no optimism in the tone of this book nor does it offer any means of reconciliation.

Erwin, C. P. 2004-2005. "Reconciling Conflicting Identities: How National and Religious Identities Influence the Decision to Marry in Egypt." *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 3(2): 675-710.

Annotation: Although framed in the context of marriage, Erwin gives the most helpful summary of Muslim-Christian social relationships in Egypt for a full understanding of what it means to be a minority in a Muslim-dominated country. The social stigma of relationships between Muslims and Christians penetrates most deeply in romantic relationships, as religious identification is a big part of Egyptian culture and socialization. There is an official legal ban on interfaith marriages, which results in the prevention of cultural diversity and overt discrimination. Erwin details the pervasive discrimination against non-Muslims from identity cards revealing one's religion, to conditional rights granted only if non-Muslims submit to Muslim sovereignty.

Goddard, Hugh. 2000. A history of Christian-Muslim Relations. Chicago, Illinois: New Amsterdam Books.

Annotation: As an academic expert on Muslim-Christian relations, Goddard stands firmly on his belief that the problem lies in that neither religion knows much about the other across the global community. Consequently, his emphasis lies on perceptions and attitudes within various countries and how individual challenges can be viewed within this framework. For example, the Age of Enlightenment allowed for the flow of sources and texts to become available to Westerners, thereby exposing Islamic history and Quranic texts and revising misconceptions of the Arab world. The historic narrative highlights the defining moments in the relationship's history and looks forward to improving bonds by using the underlying trends as a reference.

Guindy, Adel. 2006. "The Islamization of Egypt." *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 10 (3). Available online: http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2006/issue3/jv10no3a7.html.

Annotation: This article addresses the recent strengthening of the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamist movements in Egypt. It traces the current resulting adverse effects on the Egyptian Copts in all aspects of daily life. The author reinforces his position by referencing specific fatwas that have hindered the progress of modernization and Westernization in social and civil settings. The reading provides an inclusive examination of Egyptian society, laws, and statistics as the

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country transitions away from nationalism and how the devolving reforms restrict Copts in particular. This article is compelling in that it gives actual cases affected by the fatwas and personalizes the plight of the persecuted with a plethora of details from a French perspective.

Hassan, Sana (ed.). 2003. <u>Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Century Long Struggle for Coptic Equality</u>. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Annotation: This work traces the history and origin of Coptic Christianity in Egypt through the leadership of Pope Shenuda III and assesses the contributions of his moral and political support of the Coptic people. The book progresses from recounting the Copts as an ignored minority to exploring the community of solidarity in light of the predominantly Muslim Egyptian society and amidst the growing rise of Islamic fundamentalism. Because the topic of a Christian minority has been a taboo, Hassan says what many Egyptians are not comfortable discussing. Hassan focuses on the internal dynamic of the evolving middle class Coptic community both historically and socially. A great interpretation of religious relationships in the Middle East, this read is an objective portrayal of the Church in today's Egypt.

Jabbour, Nabeel T. 1993. <u>The Rumbling Volcano: Islamic Fundamentalism in Egypt</u>. Pasadena, California: Mandate Press.

Annotation: Jabbour seeks to answer questions about Egyptian attitudes towards popular religions in the face of increasing Islamic Fundamentalism. Through an anthropological lens, the author explores the degree of fundamentalism reached by groups such as al-Banna, Qutb, Shukri, Jama'at and The Muslim Brotherhood with regards to their treatment of non-Muslims. Jabbour explores important attitudes towards Jihad and what role minority religions play in the pursuit of an Islamic state. He addresses factors contributing to the development of fundamentalism, including economic and social factors, which influence feelings towards non-Muslims. Easy to read and progressive in its nature, this book provides a linear history of fundamentalism in Egypt and its impact on non-Muslim life.

Lewis, Jonathan Eric. 2003. The Coptic Path. *U.S. Copts Association.* Available online: http://www.copts.com/english/?p=2639.

Annotation: Lewis empowers Egypt to take charge of liberating Coptic Christians from their religious plight not only in the name of democracy, but also for self-interest and advancement of Egyptian society. This opinion piece also invites Christians from around the globe to recognize Coptic struggles and the Islamic terrorism that represses them. Lewis makes recommendations to both the American and Egyptian governments to take steps to remedy the quandary of Copts and to promote democracy in a collective revolution against Islamic extremism. He speaks to a broad audience that may be unfamiliar with Coptic history or challenges, but insists on everyone's involvement in remedying human rights violations against the Copts.

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Masriya, Y. 1977. "A Christian minority: The Copts in Egypt." in Case Studies on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: A World Survey, 77- 93. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Annotation: Pulled from a composite of recent global concerns on human rights issues ranging from Russia, Mozambique, China, and Egypt, this chapter is written by an Egyptian woman who was exiled from Egypt and currently writes under a pseudonym. Beginning with a brief summary of the Coptic past and origins, the author focuses primarily on political and cultural clashes between the Muslim and Christian communities in modern Egypt. She discusses how social reforms led to the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, which inevitably prompted the holy cleansing of Copts. With a strong voice against the religious nationalism she describes, Masriya assesses the conditions that have subjected Copts to injustices. The criticism concludes with a copy of a telegram from the Christian Churches of Egypt to former President Sadat pleading for equality and recognition.

Martin, Gianstefano C. 2009. "The Dhimmi Narrative: A comparison between the historical and the actual in the context of Christian-Muslim Relations in Modern Egypt." Master's Thesis for the Naval Postgraduate School, Montgomery, CA.

Annotation: The discussion of the Christian experience in Egypt today is presented as a contrast to past interactions between Christians and Muslims in Egypt in order to determine whether *dhimmi* has maintained historical continuity. Because the term *dhimmi*—generally applied to non-Muslims to mean "protected people"—has evolved with varying connotations, the author seeks to define it clearly and determine if the label can accurately continue to be used at present. His analysis begins with a thorough dissection of the Quran and the Hadith. He then explores contemporary relations during the reign of President Mubarak with respect to eight normative social and political categories including the legal status of citizens, conversion and apostasy, relation to the state, contemporary grievances, and others. Building historical parallels for each element, the author provides "what if" scenarios for positive and negative views of *dhimmi* with no decided conclusions about the fate of Christians in Egypt.

Meinardus, Otto F.A., ed. 2006. Christians in Egypt: Orthodox, Catholic Protestant Communities Past and Present. Cairo, Egypt: Cairo Press.

Annotation: Presenting to a wide audience, Meinardus addresses the broad spectrum of Christians in Egypt including Coptic Christians, Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholics and Maronites in this reference style tome. As a leading historian and anthropologist for over forty years, Meinardus amasses a compilation of resources, churches, and networks of all the denominations available in Egypt. His research provides a comprehensive general reference in the context of modern and historic Islam in the region. This research incorporates a meticulous index for scholars and those with a general interest in the current landscape of Christian identity and status.

Najjar, Fauzi. 1996. "The Debate on Islam and Secularism in Egypt." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 18 (2): 1-22.

Annotation: Najjar examines the Egyptian Muslim mentality from a social psychology standpoint, depicting a conflicted people torn between modernity and Islamic tradition. With no constructive dialogue or resolution in sight, Najjar suggests that it is necessary to view each culture's understanding of secularism separately and what it means for the national unity and coexistence of the two religious. She unravels the misconceptions of justice, extremism, and misused vocabulary that prevent dialogue and co-operation. This article is vital for anyone wanting to understand the cultural-isms and milieu of the traditional Muslim community in Egypt and the non-religious minorities who find themselves lost in translation.

Rowe, Paul. 2005. "The Sheep and the Goats: Christian Groups in Lebanon and Egypt in Comparative perspective," in Maya Shatzmiller (ed.), <u>Nationalism and Minority Identities in Islamic Societies</u>, 85-107. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Annotation: Taken from "Nationalism and Minority Identities in Islamic Societies," this chapter provides a comparative analysis of Christian groups as two distinct minorities in Lebanon and Egypt. Depicted as significantly different with regards to military participation and level of nationalism, the evaluation of the aggressive Lebanese versus the meek Egyptian Copts illustrates how a similar group can have very distinct reactions to political repression. The author also reviews Bishop Kenneth Cragg's <u>The Arab Christian</u>, to give weight to the comparative experiences of Middle Eastern Christians from a theological perspective and to explain how divergent types of political activism are related to different historical and cultural imperatives.

———. 2009. "Building Coptic Civil Society: Christian Groups and the State in Mubarak's Egypt." *Middle Eastern Studies* 1 (45): 111-126.

Annotation: Rowe is not shy about pointing out the Egyptian government's repressive actions and attacks their didactic control over civil society. The author points to the increased conflict on the state-society level between Islamic fundamentalists and secular political activists, which allows little room for dissent and democratic change. The constant omission of the Coptic Christians from the government agenda has left Copts to face severe discrimination. Despite historical attempts to assert their presence through community leaders and the Church, the Mubarak period suppressed any rivalry by dividing the church, imprisoning Pope Shenouda III, and exiling activists. In the last decade, the Church has strengthened its voice by calling on the international community, finding support in the global media, and building cohesion within the Christian community. Rowe is optimistic about Coptic survival in the Middle East in spite of their challenges and is confident that the determined group will obtain a voice of inclusion in the Egyptian government.

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Saleh, Yustina. 2004. "The Rule of Law, and Religious Minorities in Egypt." *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 8. Available online: http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2004/issue4/jv8no4a7.html.

Annotation: Strictly from a legal perspective, this article analyzes the protection of the religious freedoms of Egypt's minorities. Saleh analyzes how the Egyptian government responds to legal contracts and what role it assumes in abiding by these legal codes. The author deduces through legal inference that although the Egyptian constitution protects religious liberties, it leaves a large loop-hole for Shari'a legislation and is inconsistent. Non-Muslims "by way of exception" are granted a certain degree of autonomy on private issues. However, there is a clear imbalance in justice in policymaking and in the Supreme Court, as the rule of law is interpreted differently depending on who is in leadership. Saleh reasons that the lawful protection of religious minorities is difficult to uphold, despite the cloak of deceptive clauses claiming religious freedoms to all.

Shorbagy, Manar. 2007. "Understanding Kefaya: The New Politics in Egypt." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 1 (29): 39-60.

Annotation: In order to provide a non-Western understanding of Kefaya, known officially as The Egyptian Movement for Change, this detailed article interprets the political movement for an American audience. The author postulates how a new generation, distrustful of politics, can pull together current Egyptian politics and oppositional forces by utilizing Kefaya as a tool to reach common ground. As an expert on American-Arab cross-cultural understanding, Shorbagy does an impeccable job at teasing apart common misunderstandings and analyzing Kefaya from both a Western and Arab perspective. Really digging into the ideologies of modern social and political movements, Shorbagy highlights the vision for change utilizing Kefaya.

Slackman, Michael. "In Egypt, Religious Clashes are off the Record." *The New York Times*, January 31, 2010. Available online: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/01/world/middleeast/01egypt.html.

Annotation: After the tragic death of six Coptic Christians on Christmas Eve in the neighborhood of Nag Hammadi, Slackman, a journalist, investigates the sectarian violence that has been plaguing Egypt. Slackman is determined to uncover the roots of Christian-Muslim tensions, despite the government's insistence that this was an isolated event. Unsatisfied with the explanation provided to him by the Interior Ministry, Slackman uses investigative journalism to gather testimonials from Muslims and Christians alike who attest to the government's constricted view of the underlying tensions in religious-driven crimes. What he discovers are the daily subtleties that separate the two communities due to underling Muslim superstitions about Christians, inter-religious dating, and the stigma of interfaith relations.

Thomas, Martyn, Adly A. Youssef, Heinz Gstrein, and Paul Meinrad Str Ssle (eds.). 2006. *The Copts of Egypt: A Christian minority group under siege.* Papers Presented at First International Coptic Symposium, Zurich, September 23-25, 2004. Zurich: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Gmbh & Co Kg.

> Annotation: This collection of presentations was compiled from those given at the First International Coptic Symposium. Compiled by speakers of eclectic backgrounds and religions, the writings cover a broad scope of issues surrounding Coptic Christians in Egypt from the past up to 2004, including, but not limited to, political climate, human rights violations, and violent denunciations of perspectives ranging from academic and scientific to personal. The assorted authors propose varied solutions to the violations against Copts based on their positioning and call for referendum to the present crisis.

US Department of State – Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. 2009. *2008 Human Rights Report: Egypt.* Available online: http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/nea/119114.htm.

> Annotation: With the aim of strengthening the human rights efforts of regional embassies, the American report on Egypt seeks to direct human rights missions toward explicit programs and advancements. For Egypt, this report reflects a need for more attention on religious persecution and police injustices against ethnic and religious minorities. The report cites specific instances of violations. Specifically, Section 2 lists violations against civil liberties and Section 2(c) itemizes infringement on religious freedoms against non-Muslims. Because the report is issued yearly, it provides the most current information on human rights and noticeable trends requiring increased attention. This report is used as suggestive guidance by NGO's around the globe and establishes a universal agenda easy for any reader to follow.

US Department of State – Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. 2009. *International Religious Freedom Report 2009: Egypt.* Available online: http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127346.htm.

> Annotation: Similar to the Human Rights Report issued by the State Department, this report looks deeper into the more specific concerns of Egyptian religious minorities, such as Coptic Christians, and the violations made against them throughout the year. The document's aim is to point out failures within the state to uphold international standards and national laws that protect non-Muslims. The goal of the report is to persuade reform of governmental practices for the protection of minority rights. Most prevalent in the report are instances of sectarian violence, police harassment, and declarations within Shari'a law that constrict the opportunity of Copts to attain religious and civil liberties. Most helpful in this report is the allusion to applicable Constitutional mandates and portions of Shari'a Law that are upheld by the government. The document does not prescribe reformative measures, but does mention how the United States is

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engaging with the Egyptian community to ameliorate religious rights violations. This is a great starting point for anyone seeking solutions to government wrongs.

Youannes, H. G. Bishop. "Coptic Christians and Muslims - Cooperation on Community Concerns in Egypt." *Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst.* Available online:http://www.eed.de/de/de.sub/de.sub.32/de.sub.info/de.info.262/index.html.

Annotation: In this speech, Bishop Youannes, Director of the Coptic-Orthodox bishopric of Public, Ecumenical and Social Services (BLESS), enumerates the grievances of the Coptic Church against the Egyptian government. He raises concerns in the hope of future cooperation with Muslims and his criticisms ask for integration of the Coptic community. Rather than accuse the Muslim society of wronging Christians, he informs his listeners of the integrated development on the community level that his parish has set as a priority, to break down the barriers between religious faiths and to bring peace to both faiths on a national level. His address is therapeutic in tone as he sets goals for future dialogue.

Zeidan, David. 1999. "The Copts - Equal, Protected or Persecuted? The Impact of Islamization on Muslim-Christian Relations in Modern Egypt." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 1, (10): 53-67.

Annotation: As an expert on Islamic and Middle Eastern affairs, the author ascertains that the conversion of a secular Egyptian nationalism to a fundamentalist agenda marginalized Coptic Christians. As he seeks to explore these causes and trends, Zeidan maintains that the relationship between Muslims and Coptic Christians is heavily compounded with identity, historical and perceptual issues, and the deteriorating relationship between the two, which is propagated by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. To give weight to his thesis, Zeidan pulls from Muslim and Coptic opinions of the community on relevant issues. For a diverse range of opinions and popular local perspectives, this article is useful to anyone seeking to understand the culture of Muslim-Christian tensions.

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