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Egypt's minority communities include Bahá'ís, Coptic Christians, Nubians and fewer than 200 Jews. In the last few years, experts have noted the rise of sectarian tensions in the country, while a framework of legislation exists that allows minorities to be discriminated against in mainstream society.

Coptic Christians represent between 6 and 9 per cent of Egypt's total population. They are required to list their religion on compulsory national identity cards, a factor which some have noted allows for discrimination to occur against them at the hands of state and private companies, and in access to education and public services. Christians are also under-represented in government at national and local levels. Following the November 2010 elections, Christians held only 2 per cent of seats in the People's Assembly. Christians may freely convert to Islam, but Muslims are prohibited from converting to Christianity or any other religion.

In January 2010, the Coptic minority suffered one of the worst atrocities it has experienced in the past decade, Amnesty International reported. On 6 January, Coptic Christmas Eve, six worshippers and an off-duty police officer were killed in a drive-by shooting that took place as people left a church after midnight mass in the city of Nagaa Hammadi. Amnesty said the attack was reportedly a reprisal for the alleged rape of a 12-year-old Muslim girl by a Christian man in November 2009. The allegation had already resulted in the burning and looting of Christian shops in the nearby town of Farshout by hundreds of Muslim protesters. On 7 January, hundreds of Christian protesters clashed with security forces outside a morgue where the bodies of the dead Copts were being held. The protesters chanted anti-government slogans and were met with tear gas. Clashes also occurred in nearby villages, and 28 Copts and 12 Muslims were arrested.

Officials quickly reported that eight people were being held in connection with the drive-by shooting. One of the perpetrators was sentenced to death, while, a year later, two others are awaiting the conclusion to their trials. This slow access to justice is not uncommon, experts have noted, and adds to the sense that the state is guilty of a long-standing failure to bring to justice those who attack Christians.

In November, Coptic Christians clashed with authorities over the building of a new church in Cairo's Giza district. Hundreds of protesters threw home-made petrol bombs and stones, while security forces fired tear gas into the crowds. The Christians denied authorities' claims that they did not have a proper permit to build the church. One protester was killed and dozens injured. According to the interior ministry, around 100 people were arrested following the clash.

Bahá'ís in Egypt have also historically suffered state-sanctioned repression and persecution. Their faith is not officially recognized by the state, and as such they have been forced to claim they are Muslim, Christian or Jewish on ID cards, or risk not being issued with compulsory documents, including birth certificates, death certificates and passports. Without ID cards, Bahá'ís have limited freedom of movement, and their access to public services, banking services, property rights, education and other key areas is prohibited. In 2009, following years of legal action, the first ID cards which allow religion to be left blank were issued. By mid 2010, the US Committee on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF 2010) reported that the government had issued around 180 birth certificates and 50-60 national ID cards to Bahá'ís. But the state continues to refuse to recognize Bahá'í marriages, and there is no mechanism for civil marriage in the country. ID documents have been refused to married Bahá'ís unless they specify their status as 'unmarried'. Some Bahá'ís have pointed out that the application form for ID cards includes the provision that any false statements could result in a fine or a prison sentence; therefore, they are reluctant to misrepresent their marital status.

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