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2011 Report on International Religious Freedom - Egypt

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
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[Covers calendar year from 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011]

Executive Summary

The constitution and the Constitutional Declaration of 2011 provide for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites, but the government places restrictions on these rights in policy and practice, such as forbidding Muslims from converting to another religion. Islam is the official state religion, and Sharia (Islamic law) is the primary source of legislation. Despite the ouster of former president Hosni Mubarak, the government's respect for religious freedom remained poor.

Non-Muslim religious minorities officially recognized by the government, including most Christians, generally worshiped without harassment. However, Christians faced personal and collective discrimination, especially in government employment and the ability to build, renovate, and repair places of worship. The government also failed to redress laws relating to church renovation and construction. Members of the Baha'i Faith, which the government does not recognize, faced personal and collective discrimination. The government also sometimes arrested, detained, or harassed minority Muslim sects, converts from Islam to Christianity, and members of other religious groups whose beliefs or practices it deemed jeopardized communal harmony. Government authorities often refused to provide converts with new identity documents indicating their chosen faith.

The government used violence against demonstrators, including against mostly Coptic Christian demonstrators at the Maspiro radio and television building in Cairo in October, killing 25 persons and injuring approximately 330. On other occasions, through inaction, the government failed to prevent violence against Christians or stop the destruction of churches and religious minority-owned property. The government generally failed to investigate and prosecute effectively perpetrators of violence against Coptic Christians and continued to favor informal "reconciliation sessions," which generally precluded criminal prosecution for crimes against Copts and contributed to a climate of impunity that encouraged further assaults.

In positive steps, the government passed an antidiscrimination law, arrested and began prosecution of the alleged instigators of sectarian rioting in May, continued prosecution of the alleged perpetrators of a sectarian attack against Copts in Naga Hammadi in 2010,

and allowed dozens of churches previously closed for safety or security reasons to reopen.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Sectarian tensions and violence increased during the year, along with an overall increase in violence and criminality. Law enforcement and judicial capacity were severely degraded for most of the year in the wake of the January 25 Revolution. On January 1, a bomb attack on the Coptic Orthodox "Church of the Two Saints" in Alexandria killed 23 persons and injured 96. On May 7, in the Cairo neighborhood of Imbaba, sectarian rioting left 15 persons dead and over 200 injured. There were also a number of attacks on churches and Christian-owned homes and businesses during the year.

The president, the secretary of state, the ambassador, the assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights, and labor, other senior administration officials, and members of Congress raised strong U.S. concerns about religious violence and discrimination with senior government officials and directly with the public. Specifically, embassy officers and other Department of State officials raised concerns about the government's failure to prosecute perpetrators of sectarian violence, ongoing discrimination against Christians in building and maintaining church properties, and the government's treatment of Muslim citizens who hold heterodox beliefs or convert to other religions. The Department of State continued to sponsor programs in Egypt to promote religious tolerance and freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

Approximately 90 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. Shia Muslims constitute significantly less than 1 percent of the population. Estimates of the percentage of Christians range from 8 to 12 percent (6 to 10 million), the majority of whom belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. The country's Jewish community numbers about 100 persons, mostly senior citizens.

Other Christian communities together constitute less than 2 percent of the population and include the Armenian Apostolic, Catholic (Armenian, Chaldean, Greek, Melkite, Roman, and Syrian), Maronite, and Orthodox (Greek and Syrian) churches, which range in size from several thousand to hundreds of thousands. A Protestant community, established in the mid-19th century, includes 16 Protestant denominations: Presbyterian, Anglican, Baptist, Brethren, Open Brethren, Revival of Holiness (Nahdat al-Qadaasa), Faith (Al-Eyman), Church of God, Christian Model Church (Al-Mithaal Al-Masihi), Apostolic, Grace (An-Ni'ma), Pentecostal, Apostolic Grace, Church of Christ, Gospel Missionary (Al-Kiraaza bil Ingil), and the Message Church of Holland (Ar-Risaala). There are also followers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which was granted legal status in the 1960s. There are 1,000 to 1,500 Jehovah's Witnesses, less than 1,500 Baha'is, and a small number of foreign members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), but the government does not recognize these faiths. Estimates of the number of Shia Muslims vary widely, but the community most likely numbers in the low tens of thousands. There are also small groups of Qur'anists and Ahmadiya Muslims.

Christians reside throughout the country, although the percentage of Christians is higher in Upper Egypt (the southern part of the country) and in some sections of Cairo and Alexandria.

There are many foreign religious groups, especially Roman Catholics and Protestants, which have had a presence in the country for more than a century. These groups are engaged in education, social, and development work.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Article 46 of the constitution and article 11 of the Constitutional Declaration of 2011,

the new provisional fundamental law of the country adopted on March 30 by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), provide for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites. On October 16, the SCAF issued a decree to amend provisions of the Penal Code to explicitly prohibit religious and other forms of discrimination. However, some laws, government restrictions, and court rulings limit freedom of religion, and courts ruled in previous years that the constitution's provisions for freedom of religion do not apply to Baha'is. Islam is the official state religion, and Sharia (Islamic law) is the primary source of legislation.

In its January 2008 decision in the case of Muhammad Ahmad Abduh Higazy v. the Minister of Interior et al., the Cairo administrative court noted that the country ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) with a reservation that the covenant shall be ratified to the extent that it does not conflict with Islamic law, including the covenant's article 18, which provides for freedom of religion.

The government interprets Sharia as forbidding Muslims from converting to another religion. Although there are no statutory prohibitions on conversion, the government does not recognize conversions to Christianity or other religions of citizens born as Muslims. This policy, along with the refusal of local officials to recognize such conversions legally, constituted a prohibition in practice. Moreover, in January 2008 the Cairo administrative court ruled that freedom to convert does not extend to Muslim citizens. The court stated that the freedom to practice religious rites is subject to limits, especially those entailed by the maintenance of public order, public morals, and conformity to the provisions and principles of Islam, which forbid Muslims to convert. The court stated that "public order" is defined as the official religion being Islam, that most of the population professes Islam, and that Islamic law is the primary source of legislation. The ruling is not binding in other courts.

The supreme administrative court ruled on February 12 to allow reconverts to Christianity (i.e., persons born as Christians who converted to Islam, and then later sought to convert back to Christianity) to amend their national identification cards to reflect their chosen faith, overturning a previous lower court ruling and a Ministry of Interior decision that prohibited such changes. On July 3, the supreme administrative court reaffirmed its previous ruling and criticized the Ministry of Interior for delaying the issuance of the amended identity cards to reconverts. The court ordered the minister of interior to issue a decree, which he did on September 5, directing all civil affairs administrations to enforce the court rulings and article 47 of the Civil Affairs Law. The decree specifies that failing to abide by the rulings is punishable under article 127 of the Penal Code. Many Christian reconverts succeeded in obtaining their new national identification cards by year's end.

Neither the constitution nor the civil and penal codes prohibit proselytizing, but police have in the past detained or otherwise harassed those accused of proselytizing on charges of ridiculing or insulting the three "heavenly religions" – Islam, Christianity, or Judaism – or inciting sectarian strife. There were no reports of such incidents during the year. The government generally tolerates foreign religious workers on condition that they do not proselytize Muslims. For more than 15 years the government has refused reentry, denied residency renewal requests, or expelled expatriates they suspected of engaging in unapproved religious activities.

The application of family law, including marriage, divorce, alimony, child custody, and burial, is based on an individual's religion. In the practice of family law, the government recognizes only Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Muslim families are subject to Islamic law, Christian families to canon law, and Jewish families to Jewish law. In cases of family law disputes involving a marriage between a Christian woman and a Muslim man, the courts apply Islamic law. The government does not recognize the marriages of citizens adhering to religions other than Christianity, Judaism, or Islam.

Under Islamic law as practiced in the country, Muslim women are prohibited from marrying non-Muslim men. A non-Muslim male must therefore convert to Islam to marry a Muslim woman, although non-Muslim women need not convert to marry Muslim men.

Also, a non-Muslim woman who converts to Islam must divorce if her husband is not Muslim. In some cases upon the wife's conversion, local security authorities reportedly have asked the non-Muslim husband if he is willing to convert to Islam; if he chooses not to convert, divorce proceedings may begin immediately, and custody of children is awarded to the mother.

Inheritance laws for all citizens are based on the government's interpretation of Islamic law. Muslim female heirs receive half the amount of a male heir's inheritance. Christian widows of Muslims have no automatic inheritance rights, but may be provided for in testamentary documents. Converts from Islam to Christianity lose all rights of inheritance. Because the government offers no legal means for such converts to amend their civil records to reflect their new religious status, apart from the recent exception of reconverts, a convert's loss of inheritance rights may not be indicated on civil documents.

In the absence of legal means to register their change in religious status, some converts have resorted to soliciting illicit identity papers. During past years, authorities detained and charged converts and those assisting them with violating laws that prohibit the falsification of documents. The minor children of such converts to Christianity, and in some cases adult children who were minors when their parents converted, may automatically become classified as Muslims by the government irrespective of the religion of the other parent. This practice is in accordance with the government's interpretation of Islamic law, which dictates that there be "no jurisdiction of a non-Muslim over a Muslim."

Religious laws, both Islamic and Coptic, prevent Coptic men and Muslim women from marrying each other. When a male Christian and a female Muslim marry outside the country, their marriage is not legally recognized in the country. Additionally the woman could be arrested and charged with apostasy, and any children from such a marriage could be taken and assigned to the physical custody of a male Muslim guardian, as determined by the government's interpretation of Islamic law.

The law provides for "khul" divorce, which allows a Muslim woman to obtain a divorce without her husband's consent provided that she is willing to forgo all of her financial rights, including alimony, dowry, and other benefits. Many women have complained that after being granted khul, the required child support was not paid.

In July 2010 the Supreme Constitutional Court suspended the implementation of a May 2010 supreme administrative court ruling that the Coptic Orthodox Church must permit divorced adherents to remarry. The Coptic Orthodox Church characterized the May decision as an infringement on its authority. Execution of the ruling remained suspended at year's end.

The Ministry of Education bans wearing the hijab (Islamic headscarf) in primary schools and allows it only in preparatory and secondary schools upon written request from a girl's parent. During the year a court upheld a ban on women wearing the niqab (Islamic full face veil) during exams.

In November the administrative court of Alexandria reversed a decision by the former minister of information that banned female television presenters from wearing the veil. In its ruling the court stated that it considered the ban on wearing a veil an encroachment on personal freedom and the freedom of belief.

Article 1 of the constitution and the Constitutional Declaration of 2011 stipulate that the country's political system is based on the principle of citizenship. Article 5 of the constitution and article 4 of the Constitutional Declaration prohibit the formation of political parties or the conduct of political activities on a religious basis. However, political parties of the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis were allowed to register and operate during the year, while a Shia-oriented party was denied registration.

Various ministries are legally authorized to ban or confiscate books and works of art

upon obtaining a court order. The Council of Ministers may order the banning of works it deems offensive to public morals, detrimental to religion, or likely to cause a breach of the peace. The Islamic Research Center (IRC) of Al-Azhar has the legal authority to censor and, since 2004, to confiscate any publications dealing with the Qur'an and the authoritative Islamic traditions (Hadith). A 2003 Ministry of Justice decree authorizes Al-Azhar to confiscate publications, tapes, speeches, and artistic materials deemed inconsistent with Islamic law. There were no reports of such confiscations during the year.

All mosques must be licensed by the Ministry of Islamic Endowments (Awqaf). The government appoints and pays the salaries of the imams who lead prayers in mosques and monitors their sermons. In practice, however, the proportion of mosques operating outside of government supervision increased markedly during the year. The government does not contribute to the funding of Christian churches. The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics reported in March that there were 108,395 mosques and 2,869 churches in the country.

The contemporary interpretation of the 1856 Ottoman Hamayouni Decree, still partially in force, requires non-Muslims to obtain a presidential decree to build new churches and synagogues. In addition, Ministry of Interior (MOI) regulations, issued in 1934 under the Al-Ezabi Decree, specify a set of 10 conditions that the government must consider before a presidential decree for construction of a new non-Muslim place of worship can be issued. The conditions include the requirement that a church may be no closer than 100 meters (340 feet) from a mosque and that approval of the neighboring Muslim community must be obtained before a permit to build a new church may be issued.

In 2005 the president issued Decree 291/2005, which delegated authority to the country's 26 governors to grant permits to Christian denominations that seek to expand or rebuild existing churches. The decree also stated that churches could undertake basic repairs and maintenance subject only to the provision of written notification to local authorities. Decree 291 noted that governors must examine all applications for rebuilding or expansion, which must be supported by unspecified documents, within 30 days of submission. According to the decree, "permits may not be refused except with a justified ruling."

Some communities, faced with refusal of their requests for permits, use private buildings and apartments for religious services or build without permits. This has led to extortion or attempted extortion of worshipers by local authorities who have the power to close down such unlicensed places of worship.

To obtain official recognition, a religious group must submit a request to the MOI's Religious Affairs Department, which determines whether the group would, in its view, pose a threat or upset national unity or social peace. The department also consults leading religious institutions, particularly the Coptic Orthodox Church and Al-Azhar. The registration is then referred to the president, who, if he concurs, issues a decree recognizing the new group, according to Law 15 of 1927. If a religious group bypasses the official registration process, participants are potentially subject to detention and also could face prosecution and punishment under article 98(f) of the Penal Code, which forbids the "denigration of religions." There were no reports, however, that the government prosecuted unregistered religious groups under these provisions. The government last recognized a new religious group in 1990.

The government indicates only Judaism, Christianity, or Islam on national identity cards, and for several years denied identity cards to anyone who would not use one of those designations. Muslim-born citizens who convert to another religion, including Christianity, may not change the religion field on their identity cards. After a court battle that lasted many years, some members of the marginalized Baha'i community were able to obtain identity cards with a "dash" in the religion field in 2009. This decision was reinforced in April in the case of Hosni Naguib v the Ministry of the Interior when the administrative court of the state council ordered the MOI to issue a new identity card to the plaintiff's son.

Law 263 of 1960, still in force, bans Baha'i institutions and community activities and strips Baha'is of legal recognition. Despite the ban Baha'is are able to engage in community activities such as Naw-Ruz, the Baha'i new year's celebration. During the Nasser era, the government confiscated all Baha'i community properties, including Baha'i centers, libraries, and cemeteries. During the year Baha'is generally were able to secure new identity cards with a dash, but in several cases authorities refused to issue identity cards that state the correct marital status of married Baha'is on the grounds that Baha'i marriages are not recognized by Egyptian law. Baha'is reported that, in other cases, the government issued national identity papers indicating the correct marital status of married Baha'is on the basis of civil marriage documents obtained outside of the country. The lack of formal recognition for the Baha'i Faith also continued to present obstacles in registering births and inheritance. Baha'is without valid identity cards have reported difficulty registering their children in school, opening bank accounts, and establishing businesses. Moreover, even those with identity cards can find the "dash" to be detrimental, given that a 2008 court ruling noted that one purpose of filling the religion field with a dash or other distinctive mark was to protect members of the "revealed religions" (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) from Baha'i "infiltration" and to avoid potential dangers from such persons' conduct and relations with them. The ruling stated that anyone who adopts the Baha'i Faith is an apostate and that the religion cannot be recorded in any civil status or other official document because it would conflict with public order.

The government has not granted legal recognition to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but permits resident foreign Mormons to meet in private residences.

The government banned Jehovah's Witnesses in 1960. The government has, to varying degrees, subjected members of Jehovah's Witnesses to harassment and surveillance, although less so during the year. Jehovah's Witnesses were legally registered in Cairo in 1951 and in Alexandria in 1956, and their presence in the country dates to the 1930s. In 2010 the Cairo administrative court dismissed a lawsuit filed by Jehovah's Witnesses to compel government recognition as a Christian denomination. The government attributes its refusal to grant registration to Jehovah's Witnesses to the opposition of the Coptic Orthodox Church, which during the year criticized the group as heretical. Another factor was the government's lingering Nasser-era suspicion of links between Jehovah's Witnesses and Israel.

The government at times prosecutes and otherwise harasses, including through detentions and the imposition of travel bans, members of religious groups whose practices are deemed to deviate from mainstream Islamic beliefs and whose activities are alleged to jeopardize communal harmony.

The government has advised journalists and cartoonists to avoid anti-Semitism. Government officials insist that anti-Semitic statements in the media are a reaction to Israeli government actions against Palestinians and do not reflect historical anti-Semitism; however, there are few public attempts to distinguish between anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiment.

The quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) is charged with strengthening protections, raising awareness, and ensuring the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom. It is also charged with monitoring enforcement and application of international agreements. Four of its 25 appointed members, including the president, are Christians.

Local media, including state television and radio, regularly include Islamic programming. Christian television programs are shown weekly on state-owned Nile Cultural TV.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Eid Al-Fitr, Eid Al-Adha, the Islamic New Year, Mawlid al-Nabi (the birth of the Prophet Muhammad), and Coptic Christmas (January 7).

Government Practices

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom. The government used violence against demonstrators, including against mostly Coptic Christian marchers at the Maspiro radio and television building in Cairo, in October. On other occasions, through inaction, the government failed to prevent violence against Christians or stop the destruction of churches and religious minority-owned property. Authorities also failed to investigate effectively and prosecute crimes against Christians. In many cases the government used informal reconciliation sessions, which generally precluded criminal prosecution for crimes against Copts and contributed to a climate of impunity. Despite religious freedom provisions in the constitution and the Constitutional Declaration of 2011, the government continued to harass unrecognized faiths and prevent conversion from Islam to a person's chosen religion. Discrimination against Christians and other religious minorities, including in government hiring, remained persistent in practice. The government also failed to redress laws that prevent Copts and other minorities from building and repairing places of worship.

Government security forces used violence against mostly Coptic Christian demonstrators on October 9, killing 25 persons and injuring over 300. One soldier also reportedly was killed. This followed a series of escalating clashes at the Maspiro building in September and early October over church construction in Marinab village, Aswan Governorate (see Section III). The NCHR, citing videos of the incident, found that military police ran over at least 12 demonstrators with armored vehicles. Another seven civilians were shot by rifle caliber bullets, although the NCHR did not explicitly hold authorities responsible. During the height of the clashes, state television anchor Rasha Magdy called on "honorable Egyptians" to defend the army against "attacks by violent demonstrators." Twenty-one prominent Egyptian human rights organizations criticized the "inflammatory role played by the official state media," charging that a "direct link can be traced between the outright incitement against demonstrators by state media and the events at Maspiro."

There were some claims that "thugs" or other civilians were involved in instigating the violence. By year's end, authorities charged three low ranking soldiers with running over demonstrators; however, they did not hold any military or police commanders responsible for either ordering or failing to prevent violence against Coptic demonstrators. Similarly no one in the media was charged in connection with the violence. However, security forces detained 26 civilians for up to six weeks and these persons remained under investigation at year's end, along with two Coptic clergy, accused of inciting violence against security forces, stealing weapons, and attacking government forces.

On February 23, the Egyptian Armed Forces used violence against unarmed Coptic Christians at the Monastery of St. Bishoy in Wadi Natrun, injuring one monk and six workers. One victim suffered multiple gunshot wounds to the chest. The incident began when monks built a wall around property near the monastery, purportedly for security against escaped criminals from the Wadi Natrun Prison. Local police claimed that the move was effectively a land grab by the monastery and prevented access to a mosque; however, the mosque was derelict and not used for prayers. Eyewitness accounts and video of the incident confirmed that soldiers used armored personnel carriers to destroy the wall, fired rifles in the direction of monks and workers, and launched two rocket-propelled grenades that hit the main monastery building. The SCAF denied assaulting monks or using live ammunition; authorities did not hold anyone accountable.

Clashes between police and mostly Coptic rioters on November 24, 2010, in the Giza neighborhood of Omraniya resulted in the death of two persons, with as many as 68 injured, including 18 police officers. The incident began over a church-building dispute. Police allegedly fired rubber bullets that witnesses claimed killed two persons. Police were filmed throwing rocks, alongside Muslim civilians, at Copts. The government failed to investigate allegations of police misconduct and excessive use of force by year's end.

Authorities temporarily detained seven Shias on December 5 as they were celebrating Ashura, a day of mourning commemorated by Shia Muslims, outside Al Hussein Mosque in Cairo. Government officials made statements during the year denigrating Shia Islam. In December a senior official at the Ministry of Islamic Endowments announced that

attempts at spreading Shia thought in Sunni societies was not permissible and that practicing Shia rites was not allowed in Egypt. In September the Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Ahmed al-Tayeb, stated that Al-Azhar would impede all attempts at spreading Shia influence in the country and accused Shia satellite television channels of promoting Western and Israeli interests aimed at dividing the Islamic nation.

The government enforced laws against "insulting" or "denigrating" religion that impinge on freedom of speech. For example, authorities arrested Coptic student Gamal Abdallah Massoud in Assuit on December 31, pending investigation, for posting "anti-Islamic" and "insulting" images of the Prophet Mohammed on his Facebook account. On December 29, clashes occurred as a result of Massoud's alleged posts between hundreds of Muslims from the village of Bahig and Copts residing in Al Adr village. Clashes continued for two days, leading to the destruction of Coptic residences. Authorities successfully evacuated Massoud and his family, before detaining him. Massoud claimed that the images were posted on his account without his knowledge. In another case, Ayman Youssef Mansour, a Copt in his twenties, was sentenced to three years in prison in October for allegedly harming national unity and instigating sectarian strife by "insulting Islam" and propagating extremist ideas through his Facebook account.

Media and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported that in mid-October the Supreme State Security Prosecutor accused 12 Shias of violating article 98(f) of the penal code by showing "contempt of religion," forming an underground organization to overthrow the ruling regime, and receiving foreign funds. These 12 were among a group of approximately 100 Shia that had been detained and released in 2010.

Some converts who procured counterfeit or falsified identification documents denoting their chosen religion, or helped others to do so, have been arrested, tried, and convicted for these crimes. For example, on May 31, 2010 Christina Abdel-Mesih, a convert from Islam to Christianity, was arrested for forging identity documents and subsequently was sentenced to prison. While in detention in 2011 she claimed that authorities deprived her of food and water for long periods of time. Guards reportedly often instigated other detainees to beat her.

Despite a government decision in May that allowed dozens of churches to be repaired and reopened, church and human rights leaders reported that some local officials continued intentionally to delay the process for obtaining necessary permits. They also complained that some local authorities categorized routine repairs and maintenance (e.g., painting and plumbing repairs) as expansion/reconstruction projects that required formal permits rather than simple notification. Some churches complained that local security officials blocked church repairs or improvements even when a permit had been issued. Such practices depended primarily on the attitudes of local security officials and the governorate leadership toward the church, and on their personal relationships with church representatives. In some cases there were accusations and counter-accusations between church and government officials that repair permits were misused to expand churches, turn administrative or recreation buildings into churches, or add domes and steeples without permission. These conflicts in some cases led to localized violence and property destruction.

Nonetheless, in practice the ability to repair and rehabilitate places of worship improved during the year. Following the Imbaba riots in May, the government officially permitted the repair and restoration of dozens of churches that were previously closed for safety or security reasons. In some cases, however, restoration work led to confrontations between local Christians and Muslims that prevented the opening of some churches.

During the year the approval process for church construction continued to be hindered by lengthy delays, often measured in years. Although government officials maintained prior to the January revolution that the president approved all requests for new construction permits presented to him, independent critics charged that delays by the MOI and local authorities caused many requests to reach the president slowly or not at all. Following the decline in security after the January revolution, along with the hope

that a places of worship law that would remove discrimination from the church construction process would be passed, the Coptic Church generally withheld new applications for church construction.

According to statistics published in the Official Gazette, before resigning in February President Hosni Mubarak issued five decrees authorizing construction of four Protestant churches and one Coptic Orthodox church. The SCAF issued no decrees authorizing new churches between February and December.

In recent years there have been reports that the government harassed Christian clergy and other Christian leaders at the international airport in Cairo, confiscating address books, written materials, and various forms of recordable media while they passed through customs to board flights.

Anti-Semitic sentiments appeared both in the government-owned and opposition press; however, there have been no violent anti-Semitic incidents in recent years. Anti-Semitism is common in the state-owned and private media. It sometimes included anti-Semitic rhetoric and Holocaust denial or glorification. Editorial cartoons and articles depicting demonic images of Jews and Israeli leaders, stereotypical images of Jews along with Jewish symbols, and comparisons of Israeli leaders with Hitler and the Nazis were published throughout the year, particularly after the August 18 deaths of five Egyptian soldiers in Sinai during an Israeli operation against terrorist attackers. A number of privately owned, government-licensed satellite television stations continued to broadcast virulent anti-Semitic programming, which glorified or denied the Holocaust, over government-owned Nilesat. In October 2010 the government warned stations to eliminate "sectarian content" (i.e., content that reinforced sectarian hatred or could spark sectarian violence) and took a number of these channels off Nilesat. Following a court decision in November 2010, five of these stations returned to Nilesat while others resumed broadcasting in February.

In October the governor of Beheira announced that Jewish Abu Hassira celebrations would be cancelled, citing an Alexandria administrative court ruling from December 2001 that was upheld by a supreme administrative court ruling in 2004. A wide range of political parties backed the ban, which would prevent the annual pilgrimage by non-Egyptian Jews to the shrine of Rabbi Yaakov Abu Hassira, a venerated 19th-century figure. The celebrations also were canceled a number of times during the 2000s.

The constitution provides for equal public rights and duties without discrimination based on religion or creed; however, the government discriminated against non-Muslims.

As of January 25, there were 10 Christians (seven appointed, three elected) in the 518-seat People's Assembly and six Christians (all appointed) in the 264-seat Shura Council. Christians, who represent between 8 and 12 percent of the population, held fewer than 2 percent of the seats in the People's Assembly and Shura Council. The Parliament was dissolved following the January 25 revolution.

There were no Christian members of the SCAF. There were two Christian cabinet members, out of approximately 35 ministers total, in each of the caretaker governments during the year. There was one Christian among the 28 governors until August. During the last four months of the year there were no Christian governors. There were few Christians in the upper ranks of the security services and armed forces. Public funds compensate Muslim imams but not Christian clergy.

Political parties nominate relatively few Christians to run in elections as candidates. Christians made up roughly 2 percent of the candidates in the first round of elections for the People's Assembly elections held in November. Results were not finalized by year's end.

There were no Christians serving as presidents or deans of the country's 17 public universities. Of nearly 700 president, dean, or vice dean positions in the country's public university system, only one or two positions were filled by Christians.

The government discriminated against Christians and other religious minorities in public sector hiring and staff appointments to public universities. Only Muslims may study at Al-Azhar University, a publicly funded institution with approximately half a million students. In general the government bars non-Muslims from employment in public university training programs for Arabic language teachers because the curriculum involves study of the Qur'an. Media and activists claimed that Christians made up a disproportionately small proportion of the police and security forces.

In January the Supreme Council of Universities issued a decision to allow female students wearing the niqab to take university exams. Cairo University, in line with its earlier policy, refused to abide by the ruling and some face-veiled women boycotted exams in protest. On January 21, an administrative court sentenced the president of Cairo University to jail for his efforts to ban the niqab at the university, although he remained at liberty while the case was under appeal. On April 23, the higher administrative court issued a binding ruling to prevent women wearing the face veil from taking exams.

The law prohibits the formation of political parties or the conduct of political activities on a religious basis. Unlike during previous years, however, the Muslim Brotherhood's political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party, was registered and allowed to participate fully in elections. Four Salafi-oriented parties also were allowed to register and operate. However, authorities denied registration to the reportedly Shia-oriented Tahrir Party in October, and again in December, on the grounds that the party was based on religious principles.

Government Inaction

In addition to its failure to punish those who committed abuses in the Maspiro, Omraniya, and Wadi Natrun incidents, the government generally failed to investigate effectively and prosecute perpetrators of crimes against religious minorities in other instances as well.

The government did not arrest the perpetrators of an attack that led to the death of two Coptic Christians in Al Ghorayzat village, Sohag. In late November, following an unrelated land dispute in a neighboring village, a group of seven to nine Muslim villagers attacked the home of Kamel and Kameel Sergious, killing both. The attackers beat other family members and threatened to kill them while ransacking the house and stealing valuables. Although survivors identified the perpetrators, authorities did not detain or prosecute them.

The government failed to protect the Church of the Two Martyrs in Atfeh (Sol) village, Helwan Governorate, or arrest and prosecute the perpetrators of the attack. On March 5-6, Muslim villagers set fire to the Church of the Two Martyrs, completely destroying the house of worship. Villagers also were filmed using sledge hammers and shouting "God is great" as they destroyed walls. Coptic families fled the village. The attack reportedly began after the funeral for two villagers killed during violence related to allegations that their female relative was caught having an affair with a Copt. Copts called for government protection, but security forces did not enter the village for approximately seven days. Major General Hassan Al Roweiny, a member of the SCAF, claimed that the Army wanted to avoid bloodshed. A delegation led by Salafi Sheikh Mohammed Hassan brokered an informal reconciliation between Muslims and Copts. At a conference on March 12, Hassan and SCAF representatives announced that the rebuilding of the church would begin the next day.

Despite the fact that the perpetrators of the attack were known to other residents and easily identifiable in online videos, the government failed to arrest or prosecute any of those involved in the destruction of the church. After the incident Muslim villagers demanded the erection of a mosque on the site. According to press reports, the SCAF initially agreed to do so and offered land on the outskirts of the village for a church; however, Copts objected. Instead the military rebuilt the church in its same location in just over a month.

The destruction of the church in Atfeh led to other violence that the government also failed to prevent or stop. Reacting to the incident in Atfeh, thousands of Coptic demonstrators took to the streets outside the Maspiro Radio and TV Building in Cairo. The Sol incident also led to violence in the Muqattam area of Cairo on March 8-9, which resulted in 14 deaths and over 140 injuries. According to press reports, eight of the dead were Copts and six were Muslims, although some Coptic groups claimed that all the deceased were Christian and that the army abetted Muslim thugs.

The government failed to identify or bring to justice the perpetrators of the January 1 bombing of the Church of the Two Saints in Alexandria that left 23 dead and 97 injured. The MOI initially identified the "Army of Islam," a Gaza-based terrorist group, as the attackers. Approximately 300 Salafis were arrested as suspects, one of whom died in custody after prolonged torture. However, all suspects were released following the January revolution due to a lack of evidence connecting them to the bombing. No further suspects were identified during the year and Christians accused the government of failing to continue the investigation. On September 13, the Coptic Church filed a lawsuit against the prime minister, minister of interior, and public prosecutor to protest the slow pace of the investigations. Separately, Coptic lawyer Joseph Malak filed a case against former interior minister Habib Al Adly, accusing him of orchestrating the bombing. Many activists doubted the veracity of the accusations against Al Adly, but the trial was ongoing as of year's end.

The government did not investigate or prosecute the perpetrators of violence against Coptic families that occurred on November 15-16, 2010, in the village of Al-Nawahid, Qena Governorate. Twelve houses and a store belonging to Coptic families were set on fire. The arson started after locals saw a Coptic teenage boy and Muslim teenage girl together. Police arrested 14 persons, including Muslims and Christians; all were released in the days following the violence and authorities did not pursue an investigation this year.

The government continued in most cases to sponsor reconciliation sessions following communal violence and sectarian attacks instead of prosecuting perpetrators of crimes, and in some cases took no action. Such reconciliation sessions generally precluded criminal prosecution for crimes against Copts and contributed to a climate of impunity that encouraged further assaults. For example, a reconciliation session reportedly prevented Coptic Christian Ayman Mitri from receiving justice in a court of law after his ear was cut off as retribution for an alleged affair with a Muslim woman. In March Muslim villagers in Qena accused Mitri of having an affair with a Muslim woman. The villagers set fire to Mitri's residence and cut off his right ear, a punishment they said they believed to be in accordance with Islamic law. Mitri filed a police report, but the police did not arrest the perpetrators. Instead Mitri attended a reconciliation session with the accused, supervised by police and army officers. A few weeks later, Mitri appeared on a Coptic television channel, where he claimed that he was "threatened" to attend the session, withdraw the police report, and forfeit his rights. In cases involving church construction or renovation, reconciliation sessions generally decided in favor of those who objected to the construction.

As the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights investigative report for 2008-2010 indicated, government officials for many years have generally denied that sectarian tensions were among the causes of violence between Christians and Muslims, pointing instead to criminal, family, tribal, or other disputes. This denial continued, according to an October 25 Human Rights Watch report, which stated: "Since the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011, the chronic government denial and mishandling of sectarian violence that marked his rule continues." This denial of the problem contributed to a failure to effectively address religious tensions and violence. During the year government officials gave mixed signals. In March then Prime Minister Essam Sharaf told the media that "there is no such thing as sectarianism because we are all Egyptians," yet the statement immediately followed a meeting with Christian activists about the Atfeh church burning, which the prime minister implicitly acknowledged was due to sectarian tensions in the village. In October Sharaf said that the Maspiro clashes were not sectarian, but then acknowledged in public remarks that the most dangerous threat to Egypt was "inciting sectarianism among Christians and Muslims." He went on to

curse those who "awoke the dormant [sectarian] strife at such critical times." The SCAF, in at least four of its numbered statements, acknowledged the threat posed by sectarianism. However, the council often blamed either unnamed outside forces or foreign satellite media.

The government failed to pass a law that would remove long standing discrimination from the process by which Christians build and repair places of worship. The government promised to consider such a law after both the Imbaba riots in May and the Maspiro violence in October. The Coptic Orthodox Church and Al Azhar, along with at least some Protestant churches, reportedly agreed to a draft in late October, but the Cabinet did not send it to the SCAF for approval by year's end.

Al-Azhar announced on May 22 that it would reinstate "guidance sessions" for Christians who sought to convert to Islam. The MOI had ordered an end to such sessions in 2006. Such guidance sessions would include Muslim and Christian clergy, the prospective convert, and a family member of the prospective convert. No sessions occurred during the year.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On October 16, the SCAF issued a decree to amend provisions of the penal code to prohibit discrimination explicitly. Discrimination was already prohibited by the constitution, but the penal code had lacked enforceable articles and penalties. The decree substitutes the title of article 11 of the second chapter of the penal code with "Misdemeanors related to religion and anti-discrimination," and adds article 161 (ii), which defines discrimination as "any action, or lack of action, that leads to discrimination between people or against a sect due to gender, origin, language, religion, or belief." It establishes a minimum fine of EGP 30,000 (\$5,000) and a maximum fine of EGP 50,000 (\$8,330) and/or imprisonment, for perpetrators of acts of discrimination. The article adds more severe penalties for government officials who commit a discriminatory act, with a minimum sentence of three months' imprisonment and/or a minimum fine of EGP 50,000 (\$8,330) and a maximum fine of EGP 100,000 (\$16,660).

Authorities arrested and prosecuted perpetrators of sectarian violence in a number of instances, although the accused were sometimes prosecuted in extraordinary courts that lacked fundamental features of due process. Following deadly riots on May 7 in the Cairo neighborhood of Imbaba (see Section III), authorities arrested over 200 suspects accused of participating in, or instigating, the violence. Suspects were referred to the supreme state security court of Giza in May. At year's end 48 faced trial. However, roughly half remained at large and were being tried in absentia. One of those charged and in custody was prominent local Salafi Sheikh Abu Yahya, who allegedly encouraged violence.

Police arrested Cadet Amer Ashour for murdering one Copt and injuring five more on board a train in Samalout, Minya, en route to Cairo on January 11. According to eyewitnesses, Ashour boarded the train and opened fire. At year's end the trial was ongoing in the Minya criminal court. If convicted, the alleged attacker would be eligible to receive the death penalty.

Following instances of sectarian violence that destroyed Coptic churches, authorities quickly and publicly rebuilt places of worship at government expense. After the Imbaba riots on May 7, the government rebuilt one church and repaired another within a month. After violence in Atfeh in early March, the army rebuilt the Church of the Two Martyrs in just over a month. Similarly, after the January 1 church bombing in Alexandria, the government fully repaired the Church of the Two Saints in time for Easter services.

Following the Imbaba riots, then prime minister Essam Sharaf announced that 16 churches that had been closed by the former regime for safety or security reasons could be reopened. (Some of these places of worship had not been allowed to reopen after fires or other damage, while others were closed due to local sectarian tensions.) Media and Coptic activists confirmed that most or all of these churches, plus dozens more not

formally announced, were reopened or had repairs restarted. However, in some cases, threats and violence by local extremists hindered or prevented efforts to reopen the churches. The Church of the Virgin Mary and Archangel Mikhael in the Omraniya neighborhood of Giza, which was the site of clashes in November 2010, was one of the churches formally opened after the prime minister's decision.

In October two boys born as Coptic Christians and seeking recognition of their self-identification as Christian, despite their father's conversion to Islam in 2005, succeeded in obtaining their new national identification cards marked "Christian." After an administrative court ruled in their favor, the two boys were also able to obtain birth certificates designating that they were born Christian. On March 30, 2010, the Alexandria administrative court had dismissed a similar lawsuit filed on behalf of the two boys.

In the aftermath of the January bombing of Alexandria's Two Saints Church, the sheikh of Al-Azhar, Ahmed al-Tayeb, and Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda III announced the formation of the Egyptian Family Home initiative to work to resolve tensions between religious communities. The Family Home initiative sent high level delegations to areas that experienced violence, or were at risk of violence, during the year.

On February 20, the Qena state security emergency court sentenced Mohamed Ahmed Mohamed Hussein (also known as Hamam Al Kamouni) to be executed for the premeditated murder of six Copts and one Muslim guard during the January 2010 Naga Hammadi attack. The sentence was carried out on October 10. The court acquitted two other men also charged with premeditated murder. However, the government ordered a retrial, which was ongoing at year's end.

Coptic Priest Mita'us Wahba was released from prison in March before he had served his full five-year sentence to forced labor for officiating at a wedding between a Copt and a Muslim convert to Christianity. In October 2008 a Giza criminal court had found Father Wahba criminally liable for accepting a false identification document.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Violent sectarian attacks, primarily directed at Copts, increased during the year, along with an overall increase in violence and criminality following the January revolution. Communal tensions also increased, although Christians and Muslims share a common culture and in most cases continued to live peacefully as neighbors throughout the country.

On December 31, Muslim residents from several villages in Assuit set fire to the home of a Coptic youth whose detention was ordered after he was accused of posting images on his Facebook page deemed to be offensive to the Prophet Muhammad. Residents angered by the incident also set fire to two Coptic-owned homes in Salam village in Damaira before security forces secured the area's villages.

Sectarian tensions starting in September in the village of Marinab in Edfu, Aswan Governorate, led to violence and set the stage for the October 9 clashes at Maspiro in Cairo. In Marinab, Muslim villagers began demonstrating against the renovation of a Coptic guest house building that had served as a church for a small Coptic congregation. On September 30, after weeks of reconciliation sessions, during which church officials agreed not to build a steeple or erect a cross, hundreds of Muslim villagers headed towards MarGuirgis Church after Friday prayers. For approximately five hours they attacked and set fire to parts of the building as well as three Coptic-owned houses nearby. Commenting on the events, Governor of Aswan Mustafa Al Sayed refrained from referring to the building as a church, and blamed Coptic officials for failing to abide by the terms of the renovation license. Authorities arrested eight Muslims and referred them for prosecution, but they were all released three days later. No one was arrested or under investigation at year's end.

According to Compass Direct News, on August 7 and 8, Muslims attacked Christians in Nazlet Faragallah village in Minya, allegedly killing Maher Nassif, a Copt, looting Copt-owned homes, and burning at least six Coptic homes and three barns. Reportedly, the attack followed an altercation that led to Muslim-Christian clashes, and authorities later held a reconciliation session at which they ordered compensation for material losses. Compass Direct News reported that the Minya public prosecutor arrested three Muslims and four Copts, but released them following the reconciliation session despite claims that there was an eyewitness to the slaying.

According to Compass Direct News and Al Masry Al Youm news service, on June 25, local Muslims raided and burned down six homes of Copts in Alwad Khalaf village near Sohag, reportedly in response to a rumor that a Copt, Wahib Halim Atteya, was building a church on his property. The villagers also destroyed his home and robbed him of 32,000 Saudi riyals (\$8,530). Compass Direct said that police arrested Atteya for firing upon the attackers, a charge he denied; they also arrested another Copt and two Muslims accused of setting the houses on fire.

Sectarian rioting in the Cairo neighborhood of Imbaba on May 7 left 15 persons dead and over 200 injured. Clashes began when over 500 local Muslims converged outside the Church of Mar Mina. Salafists with the "Coalition to Support New Muslims," by word of mouth and via online postings, spread rumors that a Christian woman who wished to convert to Islam was being held prisoner in the house of worship. Local Christians prevented the group from searching the church and the situation escalated, according to eyewitnesses and media reports, when a local Christian began shooting. Muslims and Christians threw rocks and Molotov cocktails. Military and police forces intervened, but not before one church was completely destroyed and another was damaged (also see Section II).

Violence continued in the days and weeks following Imbaba. On May 8, 48 persons were injured as Copts marched in downtown Cairo from the Supreme Court building to Maspairo to demand justice for the Imbaba riots. A week later, during a solidarity demonstration on May 14, another 78 persons were injured at Maspairo when thugs clashed with Coptic marchers.

On May 19, Muslim residents of Ain Shams blocked attempts to reopen the St. Mary and St. Abraham Church, which had been closed by State Security since 2008. As Coptic priests and congregants attended the opening, hundreds of Muslim residents surrounded the church and pelted it with rocks in protest. The church was one of dozens authorized by the prime minister to be reopened following the May 7 riots in Imbaba. Security officials subsequently decided to keep the church closed and arranged for a reconciliation session between Coptic priests and Salafi sheikhs from the neighborhood. The church did not reopen by year's end.

Violence on March 5-6 in Atfeh (Sol) village, Helwan Governorate, led to the destruction of the Church of the Two Martyrs by villagers chanting extremist rhetoric (see Section II).

Reacting to the incident in Atfeh, thousands of Coptic demonstrators took to the streets outside the Maspairo radio and television building in Cairo. Violence erupted in the Muqattam area of Cairo March 8-9, which resulted in 14 deaths and over 140 injuries.

During the first half of the year, Salafi groups, particularly the Coalition for Supporting New Muslims, staged numerous demonstrations calling for the release of Camilia Shehata, one of a number of alleged converts to Islam whom Salafis believed were held hostage by the Coptic Church. Thousands of Salafis and their supporters gathered on April 29 outside the gates of St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo. Similar demonstrations mostly ceased after July, when the state council administrative court rejected a lawsuit filed by Islamist lawyers calling for the government and Coptic Church to reveal the whereabouts of Shehata and permit her to appear in court to attest to her faith.

During the first half of the year, Salafi groups attacked Sufi shrines on a number of occasions. Salafis hold that the practice of building and visiting such shrines is a form of

polytheism that violates Islamic law. On May 14, unknown assailants blew up a Sufi shrine in Shaykh Zuwayyid using an explosive device. The shrine of Sheikh Al Santouri in Fayoum also reportedly was destroyed in May. Sufis set up a committee to organize the protection of shrines and staged a number of demonstrations, while senior religious figures, including the grand mufti, criticized the attacks. On April 2, Salafis set fire to a tomb that Sufis consider sacred in Tala City, Menoufia.

Ahmed Ezz El-Arab, a vice chairman of the Wafd Party, a prominent secular party, publicly denied the Holocaust, stating that the Holocaust was "a lie" and adding that the contention that gas chambers were used to kill Jews was a "fanciful" story.

As in previous years, there were occasional claims that Muslim men forced Coptic women and girls to convert to Islam. Reports of such cases were disputed and often included inflammatory allegations and categorical denials of kidnapping and rape. In November 2009 an international Christian advocacy group published a report regarding alleged cases of forced conversion; however, well respected local human rights groups were unable to verify such cases and found it extremely difficult to determine whether compulsion was used, as most cases involved a female Copt who converted to Islam when she married a male Muslim. Al MasryAl Youm news service, citing *Reuters*, reported that on June 15, 1000 Copts in Minya protested the disappearance of two Coptic teenage girls, claiming the girls were abducted by Muslims and forced to convert to Islam.

There were reports that imams used anti-Semitic rhetoric in their sermons. The Israeli embassy was the scene of several demonstrations featuring anti-Semitic slogans. A wall erected around it by the government in early September was quickly covered in anti-Semitic graffiti, including swastikas.

In September squatters occupied part of Cairo's 800-year-old Bassatine Jewish cemetery and destroyed some headstones and monuments. The government evicted them after complaints were made.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Religious freedom is an important part of the bilateral dialogue. The right of religious freedom was raised with senior government officials by all levels of the U.S. government, including the president, the secretary of state, the ambassador, the assistant secretary for near eastern affairs, the assistant secretary for democracy, human rights, and labor, other department of state and embassy officials, and members of Congress.

For example, on October 10 in the aftermath of the violence at Maspiro, President Obama stated: "As the Egyptian people shape their future, the United States continues to believe that the rights of minorities – including Copts – must be respected, and that all people have the universal rights of peaceful protest and religious freedom." And on October 11, in her call with then foreign minister Mohamed Kamel Amr, Secretary of State Clinton conveyed U.S. support for the Egyptian cabinet's decision to launch "a transparent and credible investigation" into the violence and stressed the importance of the investigation beginning immediately and holding accountable "all responsible parties" with full due process of law. The secretary also reiterated the need for the government to ensure that "the fundamental rights of all Egyptians" were respected, including the right of religious freedom, and that efforts be made to address sectarian tensions.

The embassy maintained formal contacts with the Office of Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The embassy also regularly discussed religious freedom matters with other government officials, including governors and members of parliament. The ambassador made public statements supporting religious freedom, interfaith understanding, and efforts toward harmony and equality among citizens of all religious groups.

The embassy and other Department of State officials raised specific concerns with the government about: violence against Christian demonstrators, especially at Maspiro in October; sectarian violence, most notably in Imbaba in May; the ongoing discrimination that Christians face in building and maintaining church properties; official discrimination against Baha'is; arrests and harassment of Muslim citizens whose religious views deviate from the majority; and the government's treatment of Muslim citizens who wish to convert.

U.S. embassy officials maintained an active dialogue with leaders of the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Baha'i religious communities, human rights groups, and other activists. U.S. embassy officials investigated complaints of official religious discrimination brought to the embassy's attention. They also discussed religious freedom matters with a range of contacts, including academics, businessmen, and citizens outside the capital area. U.S. officials actively challenged anti-Semitic articles in the media through discussions with editors-in-chief and journalists.

U.S. programs and activities supported initiatives in several areas related to religious freedom, including promoting political participation by marginalized youth in order to foster peaceful coexistence, religious tolerance, and human rights. Another program promoted interfaith understanding and sense of community in areas that recently suffered from religious strife. U.S. programs also supported NGOs that monitored the country's media for occurrences of sectarian bias.

The embassy supported development of educational materials that encourage tolerance, diversity, and understanding of others, in both Arabic-language and English-language curricula. The embassy also supported programs that promoted tolerance among young religious leaders, interfaith understanding in communities that recently suffered from religious strife, and civic and political participation by marginalized youth.

Embassy officials worked with the Supreme Council of Antiquities to promote the conservation of cultural antiquities, including Islamic, Christian, and Jewish historical sites.
