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Universal Periodic Review

Arab Republic of Egypt

Submission of Jubilee Campaign USA, Inc.

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Jubilee Campaign promotes the human rights and religious liberty of ethnic and religious minorities; advocates the release of prisoners of conscience; and protects and promotes the freedom and safety of children from bodily harm and sexual exploitation.

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Universal Periodic Review of Member-State Egypt

Jubilee Campaign USA, Inc., in special consultative status with ECOSOC, submits this analysis of religious freedom and human rights in Egypt as a contribution to the Universal Periodic Review of UNHRC member-state Egypt.

Freedom of Religion: Dangers for Religious Minorities

- 1) According to their Constitution, the Arab Republic of Egypt is a democratic, socialist State based on the alliance of the working forces of the people (Article 1). Islam is the official State religion, but the State “shall guarantee the freedom of belief and the freedom of practice of religious rites” (Article 46)¹. Unfortunately, the freedom of the individual is not implemented in actuality. Systematic human rights violations and restrictions on freedom of expression enforced for minorities are often based primarily or entirely upon the religion of the accused.
- 2) The indigenous Coptic Orthodox Church has faced mass persecution and witnessed severe attacks on their churches and parishioners as well as arbitrary detention in Cairo and other cities in Egypt. In July alone, news agencies worldwide reported attacks against the Copts in the cities of Zaitoun, Alexandria, Abu Fana, Dafash, and Fayoum. Attempts were made to force Coptic monks to denounce or recant their faith.
- 3) In June, two separate cases of sectarian violence erupted in two villages. Muslims attacked Coptic homes and security forces imposed curfews in an effort to maintain peace².
- 4) Refaat and Ibrahim Fawzy Abdo were wrongly accused of killing a Muslim in an attack on May 31 at the Abu Fana monastery. They were sent to the El Wadi El Gadid Detention Camp near the Egypt-Sudan border on November 22 after being detained for a week despite reaching bail. The specific facts of the case indicate that the two men were not in position to commit the murder of which they are accused³. Coptic human rights activists have revealed that security forces and certain members of Parliament were attempting to extort and blackmail the Coptic Church for different reasons.
- 5) Security forces arrested the two men so the Coptic Church would testify that the event at the Abu Fana monastery was not religiously-motivated, rather a criminal crossfire. Some members of Parliament demanded fees to intervene in the case on behalf of the brothers, and the Arab attackers were attempting to extort the Church of some £5,000,000 to testify in favor of the two gentlemen.

- 6) The brothers refused to testify against the monks from the monastery as the ones responsible for the 60-person riot and suffered a three-day period of electric shock from security forces. Currently, Refaat and Ibrahim are facing extreme, potentially life-threatening conditions likely involving torture.
- 7) In late November, the Assyrian National News Agency reported that over 20,000 Muslims attacked a Coptic Orthodox Church in Cairo during its inauguration, chanting about the sacrifice they were making to Islam⁴. The church was ultimately demolished. The security forces attempted to disperse the attackers, but the mob, including children as young as 8 years old, went armed into Christian-owned shops and destroyed personal property of Christians.
- 8) Other attacks resulted in response to a 14 year old boy who rode a donkey through a funeral procession on November 4. The boy, a Christian, refused to dismount, and was beaten by several members of the procession. It has been reported that police detained 50 Christians and 10 Muslims instead of calming the unrest. The Christians arrested had their shops looted and the police have taken approximately \$50,000 through “intimidation, ‘fines,’ and racketeering”⁵.
- 9) The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) reports that Hegazy, the first Egyptian Muslim convert to Christianity to sue the government to recognize such a conversion, has received death threats for trying to exercise the right to change his religion and is in hiding. Another convert from Islam to Christianity, Maher El-Gohary, is in hiding because of threats from extremists for attempting to change his religious status on his identity card. Islamist lawyers who are not parties to the case have argued that the court not only should deny the change, but convict El-Gohary of apostasy⁶.

Freedom of Expression: Political, Refugee Protection

- 1) The constitution includes provisions for the granting of refugee status or asylum to persons who meet the definition in the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol; however, the country has no national legislative framework or system for granting asylum⁷.
- 2) In January, 32 Eritreans were forced back to their country despite life-threatening conditions. No politically motivated killings took place, but security forces did unlawfully kill asylum-seekers and refugees⁸. Security forces used unwarranted lethal force and tortured and abused prisoners and detainees, in most cases with impunity.
- 3) The government still employs a state of emergency that has been in place almost continuously since 1967. The law allows them to detain people without cause for as long as they want.

- 4) Prison and detention center conditions were poor and individuals who were arbitrarily arrested and detained, in some cases for political purposes, were held for prolonged periods of time.

Women's Rights: Discrimination in Legislation and in Practice

- 1) The law provides for equality of the sexes, but several aspects of the law and many traditional practices encourage discrimination against women.
- 2) The law does not protect women directly from domestic violence, but does address assault if multiple eyewitnesses can be provided, a difficult condition for abuse in the home⁹.
- 3) Labor laws are in place to guarantee equal pay to men and women, but these were not always enforced.

Rights of Children: Sexual and Domestic Trafficking

- 1) Egypt is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children trafficked for the purposes of forced labor and sexual exploitation.¹⁰
- 2) Over 1 million street kids are vulnerable to sex trafficking, gang involvement, and forced labor.

Torture and Sexual Exploitation of Prisoners

- 1) Article 42 of the constitution prohibits the infliction of "physical or moral harm" upon persons who have been arrested or detained, but security forces torture and abuse detainees who have not been formally accused.
- 2) Police and the Security forces engaged repeatedly in stripping and blindfolding victims; suspending victims by the wrists and ankles in contorted positions or from a ceiling or door-frame with feet just touching the floor; beating victims with fists, whips, metal rods, or other objects; using electric shocks; dousing victims with cold water; and sexual abuse, including sodomy¹¹.
- 3) A culture of impunity and fear of backlash perpetuates these types of egregious of human rights and should be remedied through swift government action and policy change.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Egypt must repeal the longstanding Emergency Law. The law is manipulated as a means to allow authorities to hold people without charge.

2. More efforts should be made to protect the religious minorities from mobs and attacks by extremists in the way of security and to reform the security force to protect, not harm, individuals.
3. Egypt must implement additional reform to comply with international human rights standards.
3. Egypt must enact new laws to give permanent status and protection to refugees and asylum-seekers. These vulnerable people should not be subject to murder by security forces or forced to repatriate.
4. Egypt must substantially increase law enforcement activity against trafficking and address the growing problems child trafficking. Egypt must create and pass legislation criminalizing all forms of trafficking.
5. Egypt must accept international intervention and supervision in the reformation of the police and security system to prevent future acts of violence against its citizens.

¹ The Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt. 22 May 1980. Accessed 31 August 2009.
<http://www.uam.es/otroscentros/medina/egypt/egypolcon.htm>.

² See US State Department Report on Egypt. 2008. Accessed 30 August 2009.
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/nea/119114.htm>.

³ See Compass Direct News <http://www.compassdirect.org>.

⁴ See the Voice of the Copts. <http://voiceofthecoets.org/en/>.

⁵ See Compass Direct News <http://www.compassdirect.org>.

⁶ See the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2009 Report. Accessed 31 August 2009. <http://www.uscirf.gov>.

⁷ See US State Department Report on Egypt. 2008. Accessed 30 August 2009.
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/nea/119114.htm>.

⁸ See US State Department Report on Egypt. 2008. Accessed 30 August 2009.
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/nea/119114.htm>.

⁹ See US State Department Report on Egypt. 2008. Accessed 30 August 2009.
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/nea/119114.htm>.

¹⁰ TIP office Trafficking in Persons Report 2009.

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/123362.pdf>. Accessed 31 August 2009.

¹¹ See US State Department Report on Egypt. 2008. Accessed 30 August 2009.
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/nea/119114.htm>.