



THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF  
JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

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From The European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses

Contribution to the Report of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights  
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# EGYPT

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission to the Human Rights Council (HRC) on Egypt highlights human rights abuses in the past 4½ years and Egypt's failure to implement accepted recommendations during the previous review.

As described below, it is unfortunate that serious issues that were already brought to the attention of the Human Rights Council (HRC) during the first review of Egypt (17 February 2010) persist. Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt and as a worldwide organization respectfully reiterate their request to the government of Egypt to:

- (1) End the disgraceful tactics of State Security—harassment, false accusations, threats, and pressure on Jehovah's Witnesses;
- (2) Legally register Jehovah's Witnesses as a Christian religion, allowing them the rights to worship freely as guaranteed by Egypt's Constitution;
- (3) Cancel the directives of the Administration of Land Registration and Documentation of the Ministry of Justice in Egypt that prohibit its agencies from registering a title to property belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses;
- (4) Allow Jehovah's Witnesses to have simple, dignified places of worship where they can meet for worship as they do elsewhere, in congregations of as many as 100 or somewhat more, without interference;
- (5) Allow Jehovah's Witnesses to import Bibles and Bible literature used in their weekly program of scriptural education and worship all around the world; and
- (6) Abide by their commitments to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of Egypt and the ICCPR for all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses.

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses is a charity registered in the UK. It provides support to Jehovah's Witnesses facing fundamental human rights violations in various parts of the world.
2. The first mention of the Christian denomination of Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt dates back to 1912 when a group visited Cairo and the nearby area. In the 1930's, congregations were established in Alexandria and in Cairo. During the post-war years of 1945-50, the number of Jehovah's Witnesses was more than 60.
3. Well into the 1950's, Egyptian Witnesses enjoyed relative freedom of worship. On 3 November 1951, the Cairo Governorate granted recognition to the branch of the Watch Tower Bible and

Tract Society of Pennsylvania, while in 1956 the Governorate of Alexandria granted similar recognition to the local congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses.

4. In 1959, a campaign of false accusations labelling the Witnesses as Zionists caused the police to order the Witnesses to cease holding their religious services.
5. On 20 June 1960, a decree of the Ministry of Social Affairs deregistered the branch of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society and effectively banned the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt. The pretext for the ban was a failure to re-register according to Law 384 of 1956. All property was confiscated. Efforts to re-register were rejected for "security reasons."
6. The campaign of anti-Witness articles in the press increased with articles becoming more numerous and slanderous. The portrayal of Witnesses as Zionist and anti-Arab caused them to be seen as a security threat. The Boycott Office of the League of Arab Nations handed down a unanimous decree on 12 May 1964, stating that Arab nations would "ban absolutely all dealings with said society [Jehovah's Witnesses], along with all its branches and offices wherever these may be found, including the ensuing closure of its branches and offices in Arab States, and prohibiting the bringing in, and circulation/distribution of its publications and printed material."
7. The Administration of Land Registration and Documentation of the Ministry of Justice in Egypt issued three directives (in 1985, 1993, and 1999) that prohibit its agencies from registering any property belonging to the Watch Tower Society or Jehovah's Witnesses.
8. The unfortunate misunderstanding leading to the ban in 1960 continues to keep honest, law-abiding citizens in Egypt who are Jehovah's Witnesses from enjoying the fundamental freedoms guaranteed in its Constitution and other human rights instruments ratified by Egypt. More than 50 years later, Jehovah's Witnesses have not been allowed to meet with the highest authorities in the country in order to clarify their situation.
9. This submission is based on the reports submitted by victims to the national office of Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt.

## **II. PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ON THE GROUND**

10. Egypt acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) on 14 January 1982. The Human Rights Committee received the submission of the third periodic report of Egypt in 2001. The 4<sup>th</sup> report that was due by November 2004 has not yet been submitted. The following information highlights that Egypt has failed to implement the guarantees of the ICCPR with regards to its discriminatory treatment against Jehovah's Witnesses.
11. As a collective group, Jehovah's Witnesses are not a recognized religious community and are exposed to serious restrictions on their right to practice their religion as well as other associated rights, such as freedom of expression and freedom of association. Most of the restrictions on the right to manifest their beliefs are not prescribed by law but rather are the result of illegal practices.

**Right to respect of privacy, family, home and correspondence, and protection of honor and reputation**

12. Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) provides for the right of every person to be protected against arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, as well as against unlawful attacks on his honor and reputation. In the view of the Committee this right is required to be guaranteed against all such interferences and attacks whether they emanate from State authorities or from natural or legal persons. The obligations imposed by this article require the State to adopt legislative and other measures to give effect to the prohibition against such interferences and attacks as well as to the protection of this right.
13. Unfortunately, as indicated in the previous report submitted in August 2009, Security officials continued to maintain strict surveillance of the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses, their meeting places, and their telephone calls. For example, on February 9, 2010, two local Witnesses were called to Security headquarters where an official questioned them at length in an angry and threatening tone, leaving the Witnesses shaken and upset.
14. Beginning in January 2011 and for the next two years, the Witnesses received limited official contact from Security, perhaps only three or four times a year—much less than in previous years.
15. In 2013, Security officials made more frequent contact and often expressed threats and anger. Security officials made harassing phone calls to Witnesses, even visiting their homes to convey the message that 'nothing has changed' despite the revolution and that the Witnesses were still under strict surveillance. On 19 October 2013, two Security officials made visits to the homes of three Witness families, making it clear that they were still monitoring the Witnesses' activities and were actively collecting information about individual Witnesses, especially those in leadership positions. On 17 November 2013, Security officials demanded that a Witness come to their headquarters for questioning. When he came to the Security headquarters on January 10, 2014, officials used interrogation techniques intended to undermine organizational authority, to sow seeds of discontent, and to compromise his politically neutral stance.
16. Many Witnesses are aware that Security officials closely monitor their telephone calls and that their activities are under surveillance.
17. Security officials and other government officials deny the Witnesses any opportunity to meet with the Ministry of Interior that they might work to any reconciliation.

**Freedoms of opinion and expression**

18. Despite assurances made by officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2008, the government of Egypt does not permit Jehovah's Witnesses to import Bibles or Bible-based literature for their use in personal and family study and in their worship services. A request was made in August 2008 to send to Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt, free of any charge, 100 copies of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, the Bible translation used by Jehovah's Witnesses. To date, Egypt has not acknowledged this simple request.

19. This restriction violates the Witnesses' right to freedom of expression respected by Egypt (ICCPR – Article 19). The right of freedom of expression includes freedom to seek, **receive** and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

**20. Rights of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others**

21. Jehovah's Witnesses are not permitted to have houses of worship. State Security allows Witnesses to meet in private homes but demands that they limit groups to 30 worshippers or less. Security officials watch their places of meeting and demand that neighbors inform authorities about the meetings of the Witnesses. The Witnesses desire to meet as a congregation, normally comprised of about 60-100 adherents, as they do in other lands.

22. Restriction on the exercise of these rights (ICCPR – Article 21 and 22) are not prescribed by law and cannot be justified as necessary in the interests of national security or public safety, and public order. Witnesses wish to worship with their fellow believers peacefully. Religious meetings organized by Witnesses are public and never cause harm to anyone; there is no need to restrict their meetings in order to protect the rights and freedoms of others.

23. This situation is a direct consequence of the decree issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs dated 20 June 1960, deregistering the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, the legal entity used by Jehovah's Witnesses. Since that time Witnesses have made repeated attempts to gain legal registration, without success.

24. The Ministry of Justice issued an administrative decree on 21 August 1985, forbidding its agencies from legally registering property belonging to any legal entity representing Jehovah's Witnesses.

**Prohibition of discrimination, Freedom of religion**

25. Jehovah's Witnesses are clearly discriminated against because of their beliefs, contrary to ICCPR – Articles 18 and 26. The ICCPR provides that minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to profess and practice their own religion.

26. The information provided in this report undoubtedly display gross violations of Jehovah's Witnesses' freedom of religion.

**Right to an effective remedy**

27. In 2000, Jehovah's Witnesses instituted a legal case seeking registration. On 26 December 2009, the Juridical Administrative Court denied the request for registration. The court gave as reasons for denial the difference of religious doctrine from the Coptic Orthodox Church. In its decision the court repeated the clergy's slanderous lies about the Witnesses, and reiterated without justification the claim that the Witnesses are a threat to Egyptian order and law.

28. Witnesses lodged an appeal against the 2009 decision with the Supreme Administrative Court on 22 February 2010, which appeal is still pending with the court. In the interim, an administrative panel of the High Administrative Court issued a report in 2012 not based on law but again repeating the slanderous lies contained in the decision of the Juridical Administrative Court and recommending against granting the Witnesses legal registration.
29. Witnesses hope that this case will bring a positive outcome. Previous decisions rendered by domestic courts show that to this day Jehovah's Witnesses have not had access to an effective remedy to have their rights protected, contrary to ICCPR – Article 2. Not one court upheld the rights and the protections provided by the ICCPR.

### **III. IMPLEMENTATION OF ACCEPTED RECOMMENDATIONS**

30. During Egypt's previous review in 2010, a number of delegations commended Egypt for its commitment to the universal periodic review. Numerous delegations congratulated Egypt for its informative and comprehensive national report. Also commended were Egypt's institutional framework established for human rights promotion and protection and the legislative reforms it undertook. Egypt accepted the majority of the recommendations made. However, a number of recommendations yet require serious efforts for implementation.
31. Armenia encouraged Egypt to continue to create a conducive environment for the enjoyment of freedom of religion and belief, including through introduction of further measures for promoting equal rights and social harmony among followers of different religions (Recommendation n°61). As evident above regarding Jehovah's Witnesses, Egypt has not implemented this recommendation.
32. Egypt accepted the recommendation by Netherlands to eliminate all legal provisions and policies which discriminate against adherents of religions other than Islam and adopt a unified law for places of worship (Recommendation n°71).
33. Egypt was to guarantee freedom of religion and belief to all groups and minorities, including in relevant legislation, without discrimination (Recommendation n°95 made by Finland).
34. As recommended by Chile (Recommendation n°132), Egypt was to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Taking into consideration the above mentioned information, this remedy is essential in order to denounce human rights violations in Egypt and make them accountable before the CCPR.
35. Jehovah's Witnesses regret that Egypt has not implemented the aforementioned recommendations and other similar ones despite having internationally accepted them.

### **IV. CONCLUSION**

36. Jehovah's Witnesses in Egypt and as a worldwide organization express concern for the human rights violations perpetrated by the authorities in Egypt. They respectfully request the government of Egypt to take the necessary steps to:

- (1) End the disgraceful tactics of State Security—harassment, false accusations, threats, and pressure on Jehovah's Witnesses;
- (2) Legally register Jehovah's Witnesses as a Christian religion, and allow them the rights to worship freely;
- (3) Register titles to property belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses to allow them to have dignified places of worship where they can meet for worship as they do elsewhere, in congregations of as many as 100 or somewhat more, without interference; and
- (4) Allow Jehovah's Witnesses to import Bibles and Bible literature used in their weekly program of scriptural education and worship.