



May 1, 2023

Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary of State  
United States Department of State  
2201 C St., NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary, Blinken:

We write as an informal group of 24 organizations and individuals who are scholars, human rights advocates, religious, and secular leaders, and practitioners to ask that you convey deep concern and outrage regarding the Egyptian government's callous and traumatic treatment of Baby Shenouda and his adoptive parents, by forcibly removing the child from his adoptive Coptic parents. After 14 months of turmoil, he has just been returned "temporarily" to the family as caretakers, but not as adoptive parents. We urge you to put sustained pressure on the Government of Egypt to ensure the child is kept with his parents and that similar cases do not happen again by pressuring Egypt to ensure its high-level commitments to human rights and non-discrimination are implemented on the ground.

Shenouda was abandoned as a newborn inside a Coptic Church and the priest who found him, entrusted the baby to the childless Coptic couple, Amal Ibrahim and Farouk Fawsi Boulous, who had prayed for a baby for 29 years. Amal Ibrahim and Farouk Fawsi Boulous applied for a birth certificate at the time, and gave the baby the name Shenouda Farouq Fawzy Boulous, which includes their last name. The Bolus couple raised Shenouda as their own child for four years.

In January 2022, Egyptian authorities forcibly removed four-year-old Shenouda from his Coptic adoptive parents and the only home he had ever known, changed his name to Youssef Abdullah Mohamed, and changed his official religion to Islam on his identity documents, in violation of Article 20(3) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The forced removal of the child Shenouda from his parents had no basis in domestic Egyptian law nor its international human rights commitments, as Egypt has ratified both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The decision by the authorities was based on an Islamic teaching, (even though not part of Egypt's law), whereby every human being is born as a sort of prototypical Muslim, who only "lose" their Islam when taught false things or religions. Egyptian family status law [(which is based on Islamic Sharia)] forbids adoption, but some legal experts say such rules should not apply to non-Muslims.

The state's actions were clearly not in the best interest of the child who has been traumatized by being taken from his home and familiar environment and been forced to live over a year, separated from his parents, placed in a crowded orphanage in Cairo where the Egyptian authorities only allowed one visit from his adoptive parents, on December 31, 2022, and then only for a few minutes. His parents reported that Shenouda was deeply distressed and confused as a result of the Egyptian government's actions, as one would expect after being forcibly removed from family, forcibly converted to Islam, and having one's name changed.

Not until a fatwa was issued last February, and the Egyptian authorities' harmful actions came under much negative press, did the North Cairo Prosecution Office order to hand over Shenouda "temporarily" to Amal Ibrahim, as "a trusted parent" after she took a pledge to take good care of him, preserve him, and not expose him to danger.

The Public Prosecution also ordered contacting the Children's Helpline of the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood to complete necessary procedures to change his name to a Christian name using "a legal Christian father and mother and a fourfold lineage." This was a result of the investigations of the Public Prosecution and "according to the fatwa of the Grand Mufti of the Republic" of the child's affiliation to the religion of the people who found him.

While we welcome this promise, we urge you to convey the need for Shenouda's situation to be made permanent, including with his adoptive parents as too often, the Egyptian government announces a "positive" development, that is not carried through once the public attention fades.(such as slow and incomplete [implementation](#) of the 2016 Church Law, and the case of [Soad Thabet](#) in which she received no justice and the attackers are now suing her!).

Moreover we ask that you pressure the Egyptian authorities to grant the couple the right to adoption and the right for the boy to be registered under the couple's family name. The detrimental impact of childhood trauma on adults has been widely researched and well established. The Egyptian government must ensure that Shenouda is no longer subject to interference by state institutions and be allowed to stay with his loving parents, whose parental affection is badly needed for his full recovery from this severe trauma.

Baby Shenouda's case also vividly demonstrates the lack of citizenship rights for Egypt's Copts and all religious minorities. In every aspect of life, they face faith-based discrimination, and unjust enforcement of Islamic sharia as "The Law of the Land" even if it contradicts international human rights norms.

As an important ally and one of the largest recipients of US foreign aid, it is imperative that the US convey our national value of equality and work to alleviate the systematic discrimination against religious minorities in Egypt.

Thank you for your consideration of this case. We count on your engagement to advocate for this defenseless 5-year-old Coptic boy and your support for equal citizenship rights for Copts and all indigenous and religious minorities in Egypt.

Sincerely,

### **Organizations**

American Mideast Coalition for Democracy

Christian Freedom International

Church of Scientology National Affairs Office

Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience

Coptic Solidarity

International Christian Concern

Jubilee Campaign

Katartismos Global

Prayer Pioneers

Religious Freedom Coalition

Voice of the Copts

### **Individuals**

**Father John Anderson** - President; Saint Nicholas Freedom Group

**John Hajjar** - Co-Director, American Mideast Coalition for Democracy

**Tom Harb** - Co-Director, American Mideast Coalition for Democracy

**Mariam Ibraheem** - Co-Founder & Director of Global Mobilization, Tahrir Alnisa Foundation

**Raymond Ibrahim** – Author & Middle East Expert; Distinguished Senior Shillman Fellow at the Gatestone Institute and the Judith Friedman Rosen Fellow at the Middle East Forum

**Hossein Khorram** - Co-Director, American Mideast Coalition for Democracy

**Ven-Yop Lannap** - Team lead, CHAT-PRAY-ACT

**Scott Morgan** - Co-Chair Africa Working Group, IRF Roundtable Washington, DC

**Naghmeah Panahi** - Executive Director, Tahrir Alnisa Foundation

**Eric Patterson** - President, Religious Freedom Institute

**Rev. Susan Taylor** - Church of Scientology National Affairs Office, Washington, DC

**Hon. Rollin A. Van Broekhoven**, Institute for Global Engagement

**Frank Wolf**, Member of Congress 1981-2015, retired.