

Case Brief: Dr. Augustinos Samaan

Blasphemy Prosecution, Secret Trial, and Ongoing Due Process Violations in Egypt

March 4, 2026

I. Overview

Dr. Augustinos Samaan, a 37-year-old Egyptian Coptic Christian researcher specializing in comparative religion, is serving a five-year prison sentence with hard labor under Egypt’s “contempt of religion” (blasphemy) provisions. His prosecution raises serious concerns regarding freedom of belief, due process, and the rule of law in Egypt.

Dr. Samaan, known for scholarly and online engagement addressing religious issues and anti-Christian incitement, is being punished for peacefully discussing comparative religion—activities protected under international human rights law. His case reflects a broader pattern in which Egypt’s blasphemy laws are used to silence non-Muslims and restrict peaceful religious expression.

II. Background and Charges

Dr. Samaan was arrested in the early hours of October 1, 2025, by masked security forces who confiscated his laptop, phone, books, and personal papers. Following interrogation by Egypt’s National Security Sector—and an ordeal that reportedly included torture—he was initially charged with terrorism-related offenses. These charges were later dropped and replaced with accusations of “contempt of religion” and misuse of social media under Article 98(f) of Egypt’s Penal Code.

He remained in pretrial detention for months, held in El Basatin Police Station alongside detainees accused of serious criminal offenses and reportedly subjected to mistreatment and abuse.

III. Secret Trial and Sentencing

On January 3, 2026, Dr. Samaan was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment with hard labor, with immediate enforcement and payment of court costs. The sentence followed a secret criminal trial conducted without notification to his lawyers or family, without public proceedings, and without granting the defense access to the case file or a meaningful opportunity to present arguments.

Court officials later confirmed that his case had been heard on December 27, 2025, and adjourned to January 3, when the verdict was issued—again without notice to the defense. When his family and attorneys arrived at court on January 6 expecting a detention-renewal hearing, they learned for the first time that he had already been tried and sentenced in their absence.

These proceedings violated Article 96 of Egypt’s Constitution, which guarantees the right to defense and fair-trial standards, as well as Egypt’s obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), including protections for freedom of belief, expression, and fair trial.

IV. Appeal Proceedings and Latest Developments

According to Dr. Samaan’s legal counsel, the case has been plagued from the outset by serious procedural violations, foremost among them the denial of timely access to the case file. The defense was prevented from reviewing essential documents prior to conviction and did not receive access until February 11, making effective legal defense impossible. No comprehensive written ruling has yet been made available.

The defense intends to pursue further appeal before **Egypt’s Court of Cassation**. However, that court reviews only procedural issues rather than the substance of the case, and the process may take months. Meanwhile, Dr. Samaan remains imprisoned.

There are also serious concerns regarding his physical and mental well-being in detention, following reports of torture, humiliation, and abuse by other detainees. **Egyptian authorities bear full responsibility for ensuring his safety and humane treatment.**

V. Human Rights and Rule of Law Concerns

Dr. Samaan’s imprisonment reflects the discriminatory use of Egypt’s blasphemy laws to silence religious minorities and peaceful expression. His prosecution stands in clear violation of Egypt’s Constitution and its international obligations under the ICCPR and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The denial of defense rights, secret proceedings, restricted access to case materials, and continued detention despite procedural flaws together represent a profound failure of due process and the rule of law.

VI. Chronology of Events

October 1, 2025 – Arrest

October–December 2025 – Pretrial Detention in El Basatin Police Station

- Detention repeatedly renewed in 15-day increments

December 27, 2025 – Secret Court Session

- Case heard without notification to defense or family, no public proceedings

January 3, 2026 – Secret Sentencing

- Court reconvened and issued verdict of five years’ imprisonment with hard labor

January 6, 2026 – Discovery of Secret Trial

- Family and attorneys arrived expecting detention-renewal hearing and learned case had already been tried and decided in their absence

January 26, 2026 – Appeal Hearing Scheduled

- Appeal set but postponed due to claimed “difficulty transporting defendant”
- Attorney finally offered in-person review of case file without copying or photographing documents. Defense counsel rejected these conditions demanding full access and adequate time to review the materials.

February 11, 2026 – Appeal Proceedings Continue

- Defense finally given access to case file to prepare a defense

February 16, 2026 – Appeal Hearing Postponed without clear explanation

February 23, 2026 – Appeal Decision

- Misdemeanor Appeals Court upheld five-year sentence and imposed court costs
- Further appeal to Egypt’s **Court of Cassation** is possible but may take months and addresses only procedural issues—not the substance of the case.

VII. Conclusion and Recommended Advocacy Actions

Dr. Samaan’s case exemplifies a collapse of due process, the criminalization of peaceful expression, and a denial of the right to defense.

People have rights — ideas do not.

Sustained international scrutiny and coordinated diplomatic engagement are essential to securing his release and reinforcing respect for freedom of belief and due process in Egypt.

We urge governments and legislative offices to call on Egypt to:

- Immediately release Augustinos Samaan and overturn his conviction
- Guarantee the right to defense, transparency, and fair trial standards
- End the use of blasphemy (“contempt of religion”) laws to silence peaceful expression
- Uphold constitutional and international commitments to freedom of belief and expression