COPTIC RIGHTS AND FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF IN EGYPT

Thematic Findings and Policy Recommendations on Anti-Coptic Hostilities, 2025–2026

Written submission prepared in connection with the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom hearing, Freedom of Religion or Belief in Egypt (November 5, 2026)

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I. ABOUT COPTIC SOLIDARITY

Coptic Solidarity is a U.S.-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit that advocates for the Copts' rights to protection, full citizenship, and substantive equality in Egypt. We support those in Egypt working for democracy, freedom, and the protection of the fundamental rights of all Egyptian citizens, and work with affiliated and partner organizations internationally. Our organization is rigorously independent and member-based. For more information, please visit https://www.copticsolidarity.org/.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Coptic Solidarity (CS) submits this written statement to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF; or the Commission) following its November 5, 2026 hearing on freedom of religion or belief conditions in Egypt. Despite the Egyptian government's official initiatives to promote religious tolerance and national unity, Copts and other religious minorities continue to face discriminatory laws, institutional restrictions, and serious violations of their fundamental rights. The findings presented in this statement examine the relationship between these restrictions and documented incidents of anti-Coptic hostility, particularly whether authorities directly perpetrated, tolerated, failed to prevent, investigated, or remedied them.

Four key findings emerge from the cases examined. **First,** discriminatory restrictions on Christian worship persist through a slow, selective, and security-dominated church construction and legalization process, despite Law No. 80 of 2016. **Second,** authorities continue to use overlapping blasphemy, counterterrorism, national-security, and dissemination of "false news" provisions to prosecute peaceful religious and nonreligious expression, with prolonged detention and ill-treatment extending the harm beyond the initial charges. **Third,** in incidents of anti-Coptic violence and reported disappearances of Coptic women and girls, the state has repeatedly failed to investigate, coerced settlement through extrajudicial reconciliation, and detained individuals seeking protection or justice. **Fourth,** legal and administrative measures continue to threaten the governance, autonomy, and religious use of Coptic and other Christian heritage sites. Taken together, these findings raise concerns about the institutional practices that enable recurrence of violations and obstruct effective remedy.

These findings warrant renewed consideration of Egypt's treatment under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. While USCIRF has continued to recommend that Egypt be placed on the State Department's Special Watch List, CS urges the Commission to reassess whether the cumulative evidence satisfies the systematic, ongoing, and egregious criteria for recommending designation as a Country of Particular Concern. Particular consideration should be given to reported cases of enforced disappearance, torture or other ill-treatment, and prolonged detention associated with religious belief or expression. Such an assessment should also distinguish direct state violations from state inaction towards or tolerance of non-state

practices and examine whether the persistence and severity of these practices warrant revising USCIRF's existing recommendation.

The findings also have implications for the U.S.–Egypt bilateral relationship, particularly the implementation of human-rights-related conditions attached to U.S. security assistance. While Egypt remains an important strategic partner, CS urges the State Department, U.S. Congress, USCIRF, and other relevant U.S. agencies to assess the religious freedom conditions through measurable reforms rather than diplomatic assurances alone. The ongoing conditions warrant clear U.S. policy expectations, including an end to prosecutions for peaceful religious belief and expression, execution of effective investigations and remedies following anti-Coptic hostilities, and establishing of nondiscriminatory, universal procedures for church construction and legalization. Progress on these measures should inform the assessment, application, and oversight of existing human rights conditions on U.S. assistance and bilateral relationships.

III. INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

CS welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence and recommendations following the November 5, 2026 USCIRF hearing on religious freedom conditions in Egypt. As an organization advocating for the fundamental rights of Copts and other minorities in Egypt, CS has undertaken sustained research, documentation, and engagement concerning religious discrimination, anti-Coptic violence, and restrictions on religious and cultural life. This statement builds upon that work to provide a thematic assessment of recent developments, with particular attention to the institutional practices that enable violations or obstruct effective remedies.

This statement primarily examines incidents and developments reported since 2025, drawing on selected earlier cases for context. Evidence comes from CS investigations, cases screened or documented under CoptWatch's event-based methodology,[1] Egyptian legal and official materials, independent human rights reporting, and USCIRF and UN publications.

The cases presented are selected to illustrate the thematic patterns examined rather than to provide an exhaustive account of anti-Coptic hostilities. In accordance with CoptWatch's documentation approach, the analysis distinguishes state-perpetrated violations from non-state conduct. The accompanying annex provides additional cases for further illustration of the thematic findings.

[1] Coptic Solidarity, *CoptWatch Methodology and Database Codebook* (June 7, 2026), https://www.copticsolidarity.org/flipbook/coptwatch-methodology-and-codebook/. The published methodology adapts an event-based documentation framework informed by HURIDOCS' Events Standard Formats.

IV. THEMATIC FINDINGS

Religious Discrimination and Interference with Freedom of Religion or Belief

The Egyptian state has increasingly expanded the role of Islamic religious institutions and messaging within governance, education, and civic life and enforced discriminatory laws that interfere with religious minorities' fundamental freedoms. In March 2026, CS released a report titled *Erosion of Citizenship in Egypt*, which documented a significant transformation in the relationship between religion and the state in Egypt and raised serious concerns about equal citizenship, religious freedom, and long-term social cohesion. The report's analysis discusses institutional expansion of religious authorities within the state, regulatory constraints affecting Christian churches and historic institutions, the growing influence of religious education through the al-Azhar educational system, the administrative restrictions governing religious conversion, and the increasing use of state rhetoric to frame national identity in religious terms.[2]

Egypt continues to require religious affiliation to be included on national identification cards, recognizing Islam, Christianity, and Judaism as the three named religious categories.[3] This category impacts many sectors of individuals' lives, including education, personal status affairs, and employment. For instance, religious instruction in public schools is mandatory and is dependent upon the religion on their family's official identification.[4] In fact, in tandem with the increased role of religion, draft education law amendments introduced in June 2025 would increase religious education in state schools, which USCIRF found would further disadvantage Christian students.[5] In the public sector, Copts typically hold less than 2 percent of senior state posts, none in the security and intelligence services,[6] a phenomenon CS has repeatedly labeled as a "glass ceiling" Copts face in government-appointed positions.[7]

Law No. 80 of 2016, while commendable for offering a relatively clearer legal avenue to build Christian places of worship, continues to face major implementation challenges and an enduring "securitized" approach to Coptic Christian religious affairs. After the church building law's enactment, more than 5,415 church buildings and religious facilities have applied for legalization, under the review of a committee chaired by the Prime Minister that includes high

[2] Coptic Solidarity, *Erosion of Citizenship in Egypt: State-Managed Religious Governance and Institutional Islamization under President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi* (March 2026), https://www.copticsolidarity.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/erosion-of-citizenship-in-egypt-f-a4.pdf.
[3] While there were no exceptions for these categories for decades, a lengthy legal battle resulted in the Cairo Court of Administrative Justice and subsequent rulings in 2008 and 2009, allowing Bahá'ís to obtain birth certificates and ID cards by placing a dash (–) in the field reserved for religion.
[4] Coptic Solidarity, *Erosion of Citizenship in Egypt*, 10.
[5] U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), *2026 Annual Report*, "Egypt" (March 2026), https://www.uscirf.gov/resources/egypt-annual-report-chapters-and-translations.
[6] Coptic Solidarity, *Erosion of Citizenship in Egypt*, 5.
[7] Coptic Solidarity, "Coptic Solidarity Annual Analysis of the State Department's International Religious Freedom Report on Egypt," September 23, 2024, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2024/09/23/coptic-solidarity-annual-analysis-of-the-state-departments-international-religious-freedom-report-on-egypt/.

representatives of the military, the intelligence services, state security, and Islamic offices. As of April 2026, the committee had approved 3,730 buildings, many on a provisional basis, with roughly 1,685 requests remaining pending.[8] Even after approval of the construction, local authorities tend to delay implementation. For instance, on July 15, 2026, representatives of Egypt's three main Christian denominations withdrew from a meeting with the Qena governor concerning pending church legalization applications after being required to surrender their mobile phones on unspecified security grounds, despite the devices containing documentation necessary for the discussions. The meeting proceeded without the church representatives, further illustrating the lack of meaningful consultation and the discretionary nature of the legalization process.[9] In many cases, church construction and legalization disputes frequently trigger anti-Coptic violence that is resolved through informal, security-sanctioned mediation rather than through the rule of law.[10]

Law No. 80 of 2016 imposes a selective regulatory regime on Christian places of worship. Even worse, its inconsistent and prolonged implementation[11] has not resolved discriminatory barriers to construction, use, and legalization.

Restrictions and Criminalization of Religious Expression and Identity

In 2025 and 2026, Egyptian authorities continued to apply blasphemy, counterterrorism, cybercrime, national-security, and false-news provisions, sometimes in combination, to prosecute peaceful religious or nonreligious expression.

Article 98(f) of Egypt's Penal Code punishes anyone who uses religion to "promote extremist ideas" with the intent to (1) instigate sedition or division, (2) ridicule or insult a heavenly (monotheistic) religion, or (3) harm national unity or social peace, with up to five years in prison.[12] Aside from religious expression, provisions including Law No. 180 of 2018 and Article 80(D) of the Penal Code govern the press and criminalize "false news," yet civil society organizations (CSOs) and UN mechanisms repeatedly criticized the vagueness and selective or abusive enforcement of some of these provisions. The Egyptian government has also framed and utilized other legal frameworks, including antiterrorism and anti-cybercrime laws, with the same approach. UN Special Procedures mandate holders have repeatedly expressed concerns regarding Egypt's use of vague and overbroad counterterrorism and national security provisions to

[8] Coptic Solidarity, "Government Approves Legalization of 191 Churches—Amid Ongoing Questions over Religious Equality," April 18, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/04/18/government-approves-legalization-of-191-churches-amid-ongoing-questions-over-religious-equality/.
[9] Coptic Solidarity, "Church Delegation Ordered to Surrender Mobile Phones before Governorate Meeting," July 18, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/07/18/church-delegation-ordered-to-surrender-mobile-phones-before-governorate-meeting/.
[10] Coptic Solidarity, *Erosion of Citizenship in Egypt*, 8.
[11] See case 4 from the annex.
[12] Arab Republic of Egypt, Penal Code, Law No. 58 of 1937, art. 98(f), 45 (English translation incorporating amendments through 1999), Refworld, https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1937/119651.

criminalize peaceful expression, particularly among journalists and human rights defenders, as well as the practice of recycling substantially similar charges across successive cases to prolong pretrial detention beyond statutory limits.[13]

Copts are one of the groups targeted by this escalating crackdown. Augustinos Samaan, a 37-year-old Coptic religious researcher, was arrested on October 1, 2025, forcibly disappeared for days, and initially charged with "joining a terrorist organization" and "spreading false news." The initial charges were later replaced with “contempt of religion.” On January 3, 2026, he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment with hard labor in, according to his defense, a secret trial without the knowledge of his defense or family. The El-Basateen Court of Appeal for Misdemeanors upheld the sentence on February 23, 2026, and a Court of Cassation hearing is scheduled for November 15, 2026.[14] Augustinos reportedly faced torture while in police custody.[15]

On October 10, 2026, six young Copts from Ezbet Tanious, Samalout District, Minya, including one minor, were questioned by the Supreme State Security Prosecution in Case No. 8430 of 2026 on contempt of religion and blasphemy charges over a TikTok reenactment of a scene from the 2018 comedy *Khalawis*.[16] They have since been released but the charges have not been dismissed and proceedings are ongoing.[17]

Similar provisions have also been used to target other groups of society, including individuals with non-conforming beliefs, non-believers, individuals from religious minorities expressing peaceful opinions, and even independent journalists.

Said Abdelrazek, a convert from Islam to Christianity, was arrested in Matariya on July 15, 2025, after trying to update the religion on his national identity card. He was forcibly disappeared for 10 days before being charged with membership in a terrorist organization, contempt of Islam,

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[13] United Nations Human Rights Council, Special Procedures Mandate Holders, Joint Allegation Letter to the Government of Egypt, AL EGY 5/2026 (July 28, 2026), 1–4, https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=31106; Special Procedures Mandate Holders, Joint Allegation Letter to the Government of Egypt, AL EGY 3/2026 (July 13, 2026), 2–5, 8–9, https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=30981.

[14] Coptic Solidarity, *Dr. Samaan Case Brief* (March 2026), https://www.copticsolidarity.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/dr.-samaancase-brief-march_2026.pdf; Coptic Solidarity, “Egypt’s Court of Cassation Sets November Hearing in Augustinos Samaan Case,” August 12, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/08/12/egypts-court-of-cassation-sets-november-hearing-in-augustinos-samaan-case/.

[15] Coptic Solidarity, “Five-Year Sentence Upheld for Augustinos Samaan amid Allegations of Unfair Trial Procedures,” February 23, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/02/23/five-year-sentence-upheld-for-augustinos-samaan-amid-allegations-of-unfair-trial-procedures/.

[16] Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), “EIPR Calls for Immediate Release of Six Young Christians Detained on Blasphemy Charges over Video Recreating Movie Scene,” October 12, 2026, https://eipr.org/en/press/2026/10/eipr-calls-immediate-release-six-young-christians-detained-blasphemy-charges-over.

[17] EIPR, “EIPR Welcomes Release of Six Christian Youths Detained on Blasphemy Charges,” October 26, 2026, https://eipr.org/en/press/2026/10/eipr-welcomes-release-six-christian-youths-detained-blasphemy-charges.

and dissemination of false information. Amnesty International reports that Abdelrazek has been repeatedly tortured by authorities as well as physically and verbally abused by cellmates.[18] He was brought before the Terrorism Circuit of the First Criminal Court in Badr, and his last hearing took place on November 3, 2026 where prosecution requested the maximum sentence of life imprisonment or death penalty.[19] His next hearing will happen on December 8, 2026.

Amnesty International reported at least 29 arrests in a broader crackdown on religious expression spanning 2025–early 2026.[20] Separately, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) documented at least 36 Shia Muslims detained in a June 2026 operation.[21] The concurrent campaign against independent journalists and outlets, including *Mada Masr* and *Matsada'ash*,[22] must not go unnoticed nor be considered an isolated practice from the aforementioned cases. Rather, CS emphasizes that these restrictions operate in tandem to suppress both freedoms of religion or belief and freedom of opinion and expression.

Anti-Coptic Violence and Impunity

Incidents of anti-Coptic violence[23] continue to be reported, particularly around disputed church construction and use, in large part due to the state's failure and, sometimes, complicity in addressing and remedying incidents or enacting effective measures to prevent future ones. For instance, despite the enactment of Law No. 80 of 2016, attempts to open or use churches, particularly in Upper Egypt, have repeatedly triggered anti-Coptic rhetoric and subsequent violence or mob attacks, including in Kom al-Lufi (2017), Dimshaw Hashem (2018), and Al-Fawakher (2023).[24]

On July 8, 2026, in El-Tal El-Qibliya, Minya, a dispute between a police officer and a Christian resident escalated into an assault on two Christians, after which dozens of residents surrounded the building used as the village church and hurled stones at it as well as at nearby Coptic homes,

[18] Amnesty International, "Egypt: Tortured Convert on Trial for His Religious Beliefs: Said Abdelrazek," May 7, 2026, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/0973/2026/en/.
[19] Coptic Solidarity, "Trial of Convert Said Abdelrazek Adjourned to November 3," October 22, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/10/22/trial-of-convert-said-abdelrazek-adjourned-to-november-3/.
[20] Amnesty International, "Egypt: Authorities Must End Crackdown on Individuals Discussing Religious Beliefs Online," January 29, 2026, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/01/egypt-end-crackdown-on-individuals-discussing-religious-beliefs-online/.
[21] EIPR, "Call for Immediate Release of Shia Muslims as Number of Arrests Reaches 36," August 2, 2026, https://eipr.org/en/press/2026/08/call-immediate-release-shia-muslims-number-arrests-reaches-36.
[22] Human Rights Watch, "Egypt: Drop Charges Against Prominent Journalist," October 27, 2026, https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/10/27/egypt-drop-charges-against-prominent-journalist.
[23] Coptic Solidarity uses "anti-Coptic violence" rather than "sectarian" or "communal" violence to avoid suggesting that attacks involve a symmetrical, two-way confrontation between equally situated groups, which is not the case in the Coptic context.
[24] Coptic Solidarity, *Erosion of Citizenship in Egypt*, 8.

reportedly injuring several residents. The priest had earlier reported incitement and harassment to the security authorities, who did not act.[25]

Authorities have continued to rely on extrajudicial reconciliation sessions after incidents of anti-Coptic violence in ways that displace formal investigation, prosecution, and effective remedies. In July 2026, following the Tal El-Qibliya incident, two Christians who had been assaulted were released two days later only after agreeing to enter a reconciliation session and withdrawing their complaints.[26]

The state has repeatedly engaged in acts that escalated anti-Coptic violence, often through the detention of victims of attacks and relatives who peacefully protest. On February 3, 2026, security forces used tear gas against residents protesting the demolition of a fence around the land allocated to the Church of the Virgin Mary and Pope Kyrillos in 15 May City, arresting 58 people, including women and children.[27]

Coptic Solidarity reported that security forces detained approximately 70 Coptic relatives and protesters outside the Minya Security Directorate on September 17, 2025, following Demiana Ghali's disappearance,[28] and while most were shortly released, several remained in detention until September 21.[29]

Together, delayed church regularization, inconsistent protection against violence, reliance on extrajudicial settlements, and security measures targeting complainants and protesters raise grave concerns about the Egyptian government's willingness to meaningfully promote tolerance and equality. Such practices especially undercut official commitments and statements that highlight and promise an Egypt of equal citizenship and religious tolerance.

Disappearances and Religious Coercion Affecting Coptic Women and Girls

Anti-Coptic discrimination and violence have targeted Coptic women and girls in distinct ways, including through abductions, forced marriages, forced conversions, and uninvestigated disappearances. CS estimates that many hundreds of Coptic women have disappeared in recent

[25] EIPR, "Minya: Government Must Legalize Church in El-Tal El-Qibliya Village and Prosecute Violence Perpetrators," July 12, 2026, https://eipr.org/en/node/5426.
[26] Church in Chains, "Egypt: Mob Attacks Coptic Church in Minya Province," August 5, 2026, https://www.churchinchains.ie/news-by-country/north-africa/egypt/egypt-mob-attacks-coptic-church-in-minya-province/; Raymond Ibrahim, "Egypt's Muslim/Christian 'Reconciliation Sessions,'" *Middle East Forum*, July 19, 2026, https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/egypts-muslim-christian-reconciliation-sessions.
[27] Coptic Solidarity, "Coptic Solidarity Condemns the Brutal Actions against 'Zohour 15 May' Church and Local Copts," February 5, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/02/05/coptic-solidarity-condemns-the-brutal-actions-against-zohour-15-may-church-and-local-copts/.
[28] For further information on Ghali's disappearance, see annex, case 8.
[29] Coptic Solidarity, "Family of 'Disappeared' Coptic Woman Face Renewed Detentions," September 21, 2025, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2025/09/21/family-of-disappeared-coptic-woman-face-renewed-detentions/.

decades.[30] The organization's 2025 report, *Hidden Crimes, Public Deception*, documents 35 cases of disappeared Coptic women and girls between 2020 and 2024, most aged 15 to 25. The analysis finds that abductions were preceded by grooming through social media and that, in many incidents, police often refuse to file family reports.[31]

On February 19, 2023, Marianna Sobhi, a mother of four, was reported missing. Her husband, Girgis Abaskhiron, reported that he was detained when he attempted to file a missing-person complaint with no given reason.[32]

One of the most recent cases is the one involving Silvana Atef Fanous, a 17-year-old (at the time of disappearance) with autism spectrum disorder who disappeared in Fayoum on October 28, 2025.[33] Despite her age and documented disability, the local prosecution refused to consider her abduction as involuntary. On January 28, 2026, a family court ruled that it was out of its jurisdiction to rule on Silvana's case.[34] Later, videos circulated in which Silvana discussed her purported conversion to Islam, including footage in which a woman speaking off camera used derogatory language about Christians. By early February 2026, the general prosecution decided to refer Silvana to a care facility with guarantees of family visits. However, her mother reported in a video that they had tried to visit her more than once, but the facility's director said that Silvana was never admitted there, nor do they even accept Christian patients.[35] Her family has continued to look for her despite legal retaliation, harassment, and doxxing.

While it is essential to distinguish between cases of documented abductions and disappearances, the state's failure, and often outright denial, to investigate disappearance cases raises serious concerns. With a documented pattern of religiously motivated abductions or coercions, the state's practices fail to prevent, and even enable, the continued pattern of intersectional hostilities targeting Coptic women and girls.

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[30] Coptic Solidarity, "Coptic Solidarity Publishes Revealing Report on Early, Forced Marriage & Conversion of Coptic Women and Girls in Egypt," January 29, 2025, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2025/01/29/coptic-solidarity-publishes-revealing-report-on-early-forced-marriage-conversion-of-coptic-women-and-girls-in-egypt/.

[31] Coptic Solidarity, *Hidden Crimes, Public Deception: The Epidemic of Abductions and Forced Disappearance of Coptic Women and Girls* (January 2025), https://www.copticsolidarity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/hidden-crimes-public-deception-report-f-branded.pdf.

[32] الأقباط اليوم, "اختفاء السيدة القبطية «مريانا مهني» وزوجها يستغيث من أجل أبنائها الأربعة," الأهرام الجديدة الكندية, February 22, 2023, https://www.coptstoday.com/470244/اختفاء-السيدة-القبطية-مريانا-مهني-وزوجها-يستغيث-من-أجل-أبنائها-الأربعة.

[33] International Society for Human Rights, "The Abduction and Forced Marriage of Girls as a Weapon against Minorities," June 11, 2026, https://ishr.org/the-abduction-and-forced-marriage-of-girls-as-a-weapon-against-minorities/.

[34] Coptic Solidarity, "Court Declares Lack of Jurisdiction in the Case of Minor Silvana Atef," January 29, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/01/29/court-declares-lack-of-jurisdiction-in-the-case-of-minor-silvana-atef/.

[35] Coptic Solidarity, "Where Is Silvana Atef?," February 16, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/02/16/where-is-silvana-atef/.

Threats to Religious and Cultural Heritage

CS has warned of two increasingly pervasive patterns that threaten Coptic Christian cultural and religious heritage:[36] (1) cultural destruction—including attacks, demolitions, intimidation, and subsequent detention and coerced reconciliation; and (2) cultural engineering—including legal and administrative measures to reclassify or transfer control over Christian heritage sites to state authorities. CS's September 2026 initiative *The Stones Remember* reviews more than 20 qualifying cases between 2023 and 2026 to understand these two analytical patterns.[37]

Cultural destruction refers to deliberate damage, demolition, intimidation, or violence directed against Coptic churches, monasteries, cemeteries, lands, and related religious property. On August 19, 2025, local municipal authorities demolished a Coptic cemetery's walls (managed by Saint Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church) in Rashid, only 20 days after their construction. The Coptic community had secured a renovation permit No. 6 of 2025 for the walls. The authorities gave no clear reason for the demolition. The sources CS reviewed do not confirm if there was an official demolition order, but the Church received no violation notice or warning before the demolition.[38]

On February 3, 2026, dozens of Copts peacefully protested the authorities' unannounced demolition of a wall adjacent to land associated with a licensed church project in Al-Zohour district of 15 May City, Cairo. While the government had allocated a small plot of land for the new church building, the area provided was insufficient for the community's needs, so while awaiting a response, local Copts constructed a wall around the area they hoped to secure for expansion. During the protests, security forces completed the demolition, deployed tear gas, verbally abused and beat protesters, and initially detained approximately 58 men, women, and children, including the church's priest.[39]

On April 20, 2026, personnel from the Fayoum Security Directorate executed a demolition order affecting approximately 41.5 acres of agricultural land affiliated with the Monastery of Archangel Gabriel (Abu Khashaba). During the execution of the demolition, a monk sustained a foot fracture after being struck by demolition equipment, and the injury was described as accidental. In a subsequent statement, the Monastery announced it had repeatedly initiated

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[36] For more information and evidence regarding these patterns, see Coptic Solidarity, *The Stones Remember: Report on Coptic Heritage and Violations of Cultural Rights and Religious Freedom in Egypt* (September 2026), https://www.copticsolidarity.org/flipbook/the-stones-remember-report/.
[37] Coptic Solidarity, "Coptic Solidarity Releases 'The Stones Remember' Initiative," September 2, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/09/02/coptic-solidarity-releases-the-stones-remember-initiative/.
[38] Nader Shukry, "الكنيسة تستغيث: مجلس المدينة يهدم سور مقابر الأقباط برشيد رغم صدور ترخيص رسمي ودون مراعاة لحرمة الأموات," *Copts United*, August 19, 2025, https://www.copts-united.com/Article.php?A=836222&I=6008.
[39] Coptic Solidarity, "Coptic Solidarity Condemns the Brutal Actions Against 'Zohour 15 May' Church and Local Copts," February 5, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/02/05/coptic-solidarity-condemns-the-brutal-actions-against-zohour-15-may-church-and-local-copts/.

formal regularization procedures for the land the monks had cultivated for about two decades.[40] As of August 2026, authorities have rejected regularization requests but have not provided a final, legal resolution of their position.

In a later incident in the same location, on June 26, 2026, as two monks were passing by the disputed land, "private security forces," whom the New Fayoum City Authority had contracted to guard the land, reportedly shot one of the monks.[41] The Ministry of Interior stated that the suspects were detained and that an investigation was opened.[42] Later reports indicate that the injured monk, Father Yostos, withdrew his complaint, after which the prosecution dropped the charges.[43] Father Azer, the other monk who was present at the scene, subsequently alleged in a social-media video that authorities pressured him and Father Yostos to settle and drop their charges.

The second documented pattern, cultural engineering, refers to the legal and administrative interference with, or reshaping of, Coptic and Christian heritage through measures that diminish the affected communities' autonomy or participation in living religious spaces. The most notable example of this phenomenon is the legal proceedings affecting Saint Catherine's Monastery in South Sinai. On May 28, 2025, the Ismailia Court of Appeal ruled that the state held ownership of 71 disputed plots (with limited "religious possession" privileges for the monks in some areas) that were historically owned by the Monastery (and its monastic Brotherhood) and ordered the Abbot to pay 10 million Egyptian pounds as compensation for the Municipality.

The ruling coincides with the Great Transfiguration Project, a state-led tourism megadevelopment launched in 2020 that includes hotels, an airport, shopping centers, and infrastructure to support a large increase in the Saint Catherine Municipality's population.[44] Critics, including World Heritage Watch and the Greek Orthodox leadership, argue that the court ruling serves as a legal mechanism to clear the way for that development.

As of mid-October, the Monastery's recently elected abbot had indicated his willingness to sign a Cairo-Athens-backed agreement that would recognize the Monastery as an Egyptian religious legal entity in exchange for presidential ratification of the abbot's election (from September 2025) and grant renewable three-year residence permits to the monks, who hold Greek,

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[40] Coptic Solidarity, "Demolition of Monastery Farm in Fayoum Sparks Controversy Over Selective Enforcement," April 22, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/04/22/demolition-of-monastery-farm-in-fayoum-sparks-controversy-over-selective-enforcement/.

[41] Nader Shukry, "النيابة تواصل التحقيق في حادث إصابة راهب بدير الملاك بالفيوم بطلق خرطوش خارج أسوار الدير," *Watani*, June 26, 2026, https://www.wataninet.com/2026/06/النيابة-تواصل-التحقيق-في-حادث-إصابة-را/.

[42] "مصر.. إطلاق نار على رهبان دير كنسي في الفيوم," *Al Arabiya*, June 26, 2026, https://www.alarabiya.net/arab-and-world/egypt/2026/06/26/مصر-اطلاق-نار-على-رهبان-دير-كنسي.

[43] Georgette Sharkawy, "إخلاء سبيل المتهمين في واقعة إطلاق النار على رهبان دير الملاك أبو خشبة بالفيوم," *Al-Mashhad*, June 29, 2026, https://www.elmashhad.online/Post/details/192020.

[44] Kate Fitz Gibbon, "Egypt's Great Transfiguration Project Threatens Saint Catherine's Monastery," *Cultural Property News*, June 6, 2025, https://culturalpropertynews.org/egypts-great-transfiguration-project-threatens-saint-catherines-monastery/.

American, and Lebanese nationalities. Several sources, including the former abbot, have heavily criticized these developments, accusing the incumbent abbot of acting unilaterally without the monastic Brotherhood's consent and the Greek government of exerting "unbearable pressure" over the Brotherhood to force it to sign Cairo's settlement proposal.[45] The Ismailia Court of Appeals adjourned all cases brought by the Monastery and the state until December 27, 2026.[46]

On May 4, 2026, a member of parliament announced that his proposed legislation to establish "The General Authority for the Holy Family Trail" had been referred to a Joint Committee for review by the Speaker. The proposed legislation, drafted without initial consultation with the Coptic Orthodox Church, would create a public economic authority to manage and own non-archaeological assets along the Trail, in partnership with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (the sites are not specified in the legislation).[47] The Trail encompasses approximately 25 sites that mark the journey of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. The proposed authority would control revenues generated through investment in lands and facilities under its control, entrance fees and service charges collected at the Trail's locations, and grants, donations, and subsidies. Article 6 of the proposed law states that ownership or authority over non-archaeological lands and facilities will be transferred to the authority, which will be led by a 17-member Board of Directors (with one representative from the Coptic Orthodox Church).[48] The majority of the non-archaeological sites claimed to be part of the Trail are active churches, monasteries, and religious memorials that the Coptic Orthodox Church has operated for centuries, with occasional project-based support from the government.

CS does not oppose appropriate state participation in conserving Christian heritage. Its concern is that legal or administrative interventions may alter governance, control, or religious use without the effective participation of the communities that maintain those living sites.

[45] Orthodoxia News Agency, "Former Archbishop of Sinai Damianos Issues New Accusations over Proposed Monastery Agreement," republished by Coptic Solidarity, October 26, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/10/26/former-archbishop-of-sinai-damianos-issues-new-accusations-over-proposed-monastery-agreement/.

[46] Rana Mamdouh, "Appeals over St. Catherine's Land Ownership Adjourned Following Abbot's Announcement of Intent to Sign Proposed Agreement," *Mada Masr*, republished by Coptic Solidarity, October 26, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/10/26/appeals-over-st-catherines-land-ownership-adjourned-following-abbots-announcement-of-intent-to-sign-proposed-agreement/.

[47] Nader Shukry, "Egypt's 'Holy Family Trail': When the Sacred Becomes a Battleground Over 'Dividing the Cake,'" *Coptic Solidarity*, May 10, 2026, translated from *Watani*, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/05/10/egypts-holy-family-trail-when-the-sacred-becomes-a-battleground-over-dividing-the-cake/.

[48] Kamel Kamel, "ننشر النص الكامل لمشروع قانون إنشاء هيئة عامة لمسار العائلة المقدسة," *Youm7*, May 4, 2026, https://www.youm7.com/story/2026/5/4/7401410/ننشر-النص-الكامل-لمشروع-قانون-إنشاء-هيئة-عامة-لمسار-العائلة.

V. ANALYSIS

CS uses *anti-Coptic hostilities* to describe patterns of discrimination, coercion, interference with freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), hostile discourse or incitement, and violence directed at individuals, groups, or institutions because of their actual or perceived Coptic identity or association. These patterns should be assessed cumulatively, specifically examining whether authorities directly perpetrate violations or tolerate non-state conduct through failures to prevent, investigate, or provide justice. These distinctions, informed by recent developments, drive the following assessment under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) and statutes defining the U.S.–Egypt relationship.

Egypt and the International Religious Freedom Act

The findings presented above warrant renewed examination of Egypt's classification under IRFA. In its 2026 Annual Report, USCIRF recommended that Egypt be placed on the State Department's Special Watch List (SWL) for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of FoRB. This recommendation follows a longer history of changing assessments. From 2011 through 2016, USCIRF recommended Egypt for designation as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC), before placing it in USCIRF's Tier 2 category in 2017, citing certain improvements in religious freedom conditions, including official responses to sectarian violence, reconstruction of churches, and a decline in blasphemy prosecutions during 2016.[49]

Under IRFA, CPC designation applies where a government engages in or tolerates particularly severe religious freedom violations that are **systematic, ongoing, and egregious**. The statutory examples include torture or cruel treatment, prolonged detention without charges, state-caused disappearances, and other flagrant denials of life, liberty, or personal security. USCIRF interprets the lower SWL threshold to encompass violations meeting two of these three characteristics.[50]

The cases examined in this submission raise substantial questions under each element of that standard. The systematic character of the documented violations must be assessed through the recurring use of criminal-law provisions, particularly ones that are not intrinsically tied with expression (such as counterterrorism laws), security practices, and deficiencies in judicial mechanisms across cases involving FoRB. Their continued application throughout 2025 and 2026 bears on the ongoing nature of these practices. The assessment of egregiousness requires particular attention to reported enforced disappearances, torture or other cruel treatment, prolonged arbitrary detention, and other serious deprivations of liberty and personal security. A renewed examination of Egypt's conditions should assess whether these abuses, considered

[49] USCIRF, *2017 Annual Report*, "Egypt" (April 2017), https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Egypt.2017.pdf; USCIRF, *2026 Annual Report*, "Egypt," 60–61, https://www.uscirf.gov/resources/egypt-annual-report-chapters-and-translations.
[50] International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, 22 U.S.C. §§ 6402(13), 6442(b)(1)(A)(ii)–(iii) (2026), https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-105publ292/html/PLAW-105publ292.htm; USCIRF, *2026 Annual Report*, 5–6.

cumulatively alongside patterns of discrimination, restrictions, and failures to deliver justice for decades, reveal a pattern that meets all three codified conditions.

Independent reporting provides particularly significant evidence that should motivate such reassessment. For instance, Amnesty International's documentation of enforced disappearances, torture, and denial of access to counsel in cases involving online religious expression is directly relevant to the question of severity.[51] The following additional cases illustrate why an assessment limited to the formal criminal charges, without examining the conduct of state authorities during or after detention and prosecution, would be insufficient:[52]

- Sherif Wagih Fahmi, a 41-year-old Coptic engineer, was taken from his house on October 5, 2026, by two men posing as gas company workers. According to informed sources, Fahmi was first taken to a National Security office in Alexandria's Smouha area, where he was forcibly disappeared for over a week.[53] He was moved to the Montaza First Police Station in Alexandria, and now faces charges for "spreading false information."
- Romany Gharib,[54] a Coptic taxi driver, was detained and forcibly disappeared on July 18, 2026. He had posted a video discussing an encounter with a police officer at the Cairo International Airport just two days before detention. He has been held in pretrial detention with charges of "joining a terrorist group and spreading false news" in Case No. 4832 of 2026.[55]
- Ayman Ramzy, who was detained on June 1, 2026, for "promoting atheism, insulting Islam and Christianity, and blasphemy," died in police custody after 26 days of detention in the Rod El-Farag Police Station.[56] The EIPR, which represented Ramzy in Case No. 7847 of 2026, reported that Ramzy was forcibly disappeared for 5 days and interrogated without legal counsel, and that authorities deliberately ignored signs of deterioration of his health as well as visible injuries.[57]

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[51] Amnesty International, "Egypt: Authorities Must End Crackdown on Individuals Discussing Religious Beliefs Online."
[52] See also the cases of Augustinos Samaan, Said Abdelrazek, and Girgis Abaskhiron.
[53] *The Christian Post*, "Copt Arrested after Speaking against Islam Being Pushed in Egypt Schools," republished by Coptic Solidarity, November 5, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/11/05/copt-arrested-after-speaking-against-islam-being-pushed-in-egypt-schools/.
[54] Al Manassa News Desk, "Taxi Driver Detained after Refusing Airport Officer's Request," *Al Manassa*, October 6, 2026, https://manassa.news/en/news/34296.
[55] Coptic Solidarity, "Coptic Solidarity Calls for the Immediate Release of Romany Gharib Adly Azer," September 3, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/09/03/coptic-solidarity-calls-for-the-immediate-release-of-romany-gharib-adly-azer/.
[56] Coptic Solidarity, "Egypt Must Explain the Death of Ayman Ramzy in Police Custody," July 2, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/07/02/egypt-must-explain-the-death-of-ayman-ramzy-in-police-custody/.
[57] EIPR, "After a Series of Violations: Public Prosecutor Must Disclose Circumstances of Ayman Ramzy's Death at Rod El-Farag Police Station," July 9, 2026, https://eipr.org/en/press/2026/07/after-series-violations-public-prosecutor-must-disclose-circumstances-ayman-ramzy%E2%80%99s.

These cases concern individuals from different religious backgrounds and should be assessed alongside the Coptic-specific cases. They reveal a dangerous pattern involving detention, ill-treatment, and serious deprivations of liberty recurring across cases implicating different state institutions. USCIRF should therefore examine whether recurrence, severity, and institutional character, considered alongside the state's response to non-state violations, satisfy the systematic, ongoing, and egregious criteria. If the Commission determines that the cumulative evidence does not meet the CPC threshold, its assessment should identify the evidentiary and legal grounds supporting the continuation of a SWL recommendation.

Religious Freedom and the U.S.–Egypt Relationship

Egypt occupies a longstanding position in U.S. regional security policy that has been morally, legally, and politically tied to American engagement with Cairo to improve its human rights situation, particularly when providing security assistance. The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 makes promotion of internationally recognized human rights a U.S. foreign-policy objective. Under section 502B(a)(4), the President must give particular consideration to particularly severe religious-freedom violations when determining whether a government engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights.[58]

In practice, Congress has regularly attached human-rights-related requirements to foreign assistance for Egypt. The most recent, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2026, makes available at least $1.3 billion in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for Egypt, under §7041(a)(1)(B), plus at least $75 million in additional FMF under §7041(a)(2). Of the first allocation, $320 million is subject to withholding pending specified certification, with statutory waiver authority. The law also authorizes the Secretary of State to waive those requirements on national security grounds.[59] On September 21, 2026, Secretary of State Marco Rubio notified Congress of a decision to waive the human-rights certification requirement covering $320 million in FY2025 FMF for Egypt.[60]

Another factor warranting scrutiny in the U.S.–Egypt relationship is the Egyptian government's sustained lobbying and public relations efforts aimed at influencing U.S. policymakers. CS's June 2025 report, *Cairo's Covert Power in Washington*, analyzed Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) filings and identified 13 firms and individual agents representing Egyptian interests

[58] Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, § 502B(a)(1)–(4), 22 U.S.C. § 2304(a)(1)–(4) (2026), https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-1071/pdf/COMPS-1071.pdf.
[59] Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026, Pub. L. No. 119-75, div. F, § 7041(a)(1)(B), (2), (4), 140 Stat. 173 (February 3, 2026), https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/PLAW-119publ75; Jeremy M. Sharp, *Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations*, CRS Report No. RL33003 (Congressional Research Service, February 25, 2026), https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2026-02-25_RL33003_9e08b814f459e31d83dbf86f25885db4406307b1.html.
[60] Alexander Dziadosz, Patricia Zengerle, and Humeyra Pamuk, "Citing Iran War, US Waives Rights Condition on Egypt Military Aid," *Reuters*, October 1, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/us-waives-rights-conditions-320-million-military-aid-egypt-letter-shows-2026-10-01/.

and more than 5,500 reported political activities between late 2013 and mid-2025. The investigation found that securing continued U.S. assistance and promoting a favorable account of Egypt's human rights and religious freedom record were recurring objectives of these activities.[61] CS further examined these practices in its September 2026 three-part series, *Egypt's Access Machine in Washington*, documenting how registered foreign agents cultivated relationships with congressional offices, targeted the leaders of the Friends of Egypt Caucus, House Foreign Affairs Committee, and its Middle East and North Africa Subcommittee, while religious networks advanced similar narratives portraying the Egyptian government as a model of religious tolerance.[62] These efforts raise concerns about how closely Cairo-sponsored representations of religious freedom conditions are scrutinized against independent findings, particularly when U.S. officials assess Egypt's human rights record and continued security assistance.

USCIRF's 2026 Annual Report recommended integrating religious freedom improvements into the broader U.S.–Egypt security cooperation and foreign assistance. It specifically identified the release of prisoners of conscience and the lifting of travel bans on religious dissidents as examples of meaningful progress.[63] The documented findings in this submission identify additional areas where implementation can be evaluated, including ending incompatible restrictions on religious belief and expression; ensuring effective remedies following anti-Coptic violence; adopting equal rules for all places of worship; and improving transparency in investigations of alleged anti-Coptic hostilities.

The strategic importance of Egypt does not resolve the question of how U.S. policy should address documented violations of fundamental rights. The findings presented in this submission call for measurable improvements in the protection of FoRB, access to fair and transparent judicial proceedings, proper investigations following anti-Coptic hostilities, and nondiscriminatory procedures governing places of worship. These indicators provide the basis that should inform the State Department’s application of human-rights-related conditions and discretionary waivers, alongside congressional oversight of their implementation and outcomes. Without transparent and measurable assessments of these reforms, policymakers cannot reliably determine whether bilateral engagement has improved religious freedom conditions in Egypt.

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[61] Mark Basta, *Cairo’s Covert Power in Washington: An Analysis of the Egyptian Lobby in the US since 2014* (Coptic Solidarity, June 2025), https://www.copticsolidarity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/basta-m.-2025-cairos-covert-power-in-washington.-cs-summer-report.pdf; see also Coptic Solidarity.

[62] Coptic Solidarity, “Egypt’s Access Machine in Washington—Part I,” September 16, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/09/16/part-1-egypts-access-machine-brownstein-ed-royce-and-the-friends-of-egypt-caucus/; Coptic Solidarity, “Egypt’s Access Machine in Washington—Part II,” September 24, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/09/24/egypts-access-machine-in-washington-part-ii/; Coptic Solidarity, “Egypt’s Access Machine in Washington—Part III,” September 28, 2026, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2026/09/28/egypts-access-machine-in-washington-part-iii/.

[63] USCIRF, *2026 Annual Report*, “Egypt,” 60.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

To USCIRF

1. **Reassess Egypt's eligibility for designation as a CPC.**

CS recommends that the Commission reassess whether the documented violations in Egypt, considered cumulatively, satisfy the systematic, ongoing, and egregious criteria under 22 U.S.C. §§ 6402(13), 6442(b) in the next review cycle. Such an assessment should distinguish direct state violations from state tolerance of non-state conduct, examine reported cases of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and other serious deprivations of liberty, and explain whether the available evidence warrants revising USCIRF's existing SWL recommendation.

2. **Expand Egypt's country reporting to evaluate state accountability and access to effective remedies.**

CS encourages the Commission to incorporate a more thorough examination of the Egyptian government's response to religious freedom violations, including the initiation and outcomes of investigations, prosecution decisions, forced reconciliation practices, and the detention of complainants or demonstrators, in its next Egypt country update and annual reporting cycle. The assessment should particularly examine incidents involving church construction or operation, investigation into religious coercion and disappearance, and security responses to anti-Coptic violence.

3. **Increase CSO and congressional engagement on individual cases through USCIRF's FoRB Victims List and Congress’s Defending Freedoms Project.**

Commending its existing documentation efforts, CS encourages the Commission to strengthen its engagement with CSOs and independent monitors to identify, verify, and follow up on cases warranting inclusion in the Frank R. Wolf FoRB Victims List. The Commission currently documents 20 victims in Egypt, including several Copts. Such cooperation should facilitate timely updates on consequential developments involving existing cases while ensuring that newly documented cases are considered in accordance with the List's established criteria. CS further encourages USCIRF to expand its coordination with the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission through the Defending Freedoms Project (DFP), including the nomination of qualifying Egyptian prisoners of conscience for congressional sponsorship and the promotion of targeted and sustained advocacy by Members of Congress.

4. **Review the implementation of USCIRF's existing Egypt recommendations within U.S. policy in the 2027 Annual Report.**

CS urges the Commission to assess the implementation and outcomes of its 2026 recommendations, particularly those on integrating religious freedom improvements into U.S.–Egypt bilateral engagement, the repeal of Penal Code Article 98(f), and the expanded engagement in Upper Egypt. The review should track measures taken by relevant U.S. actors and the Egyptian authorities, distinguishing changes in practice from diplomatic assurances.

5. **Expand the Commission's efforts assessing foreign-government influence on U.S. religious freedom policy.**

Building on its recommendation concerning paid lobbying by governments designated as CPCs, CS urges the Commission to examine comparable activities undertaken on behalf of governments that USCIRF has recommended for, or the State Department has placed on, the SWL, including Egypt. While USCIRF investigates the impact of foreign influence on U.S.–IRF policy, CS encourages the Commission to integrate country-specific analyses when appropriate in its next annual report.

To U.S. Department of State

1. **Pursue sustained, targeted diplomatic engagement and monitoring of religious freedom violations.**

CS urges the Department to direct the Office of International Religious Freedom (OIRF), in coordination with the broader Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, and the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, to establish a diplomatic engagement and monitoring process in coordination with Egyptian authorities (when appropriate), particularly concerning:

   a. The criminalization of peaceful religious belief and expression through blasphemy, counterterrorism, cybercrime, and national security provisions;
   b. discriminatory restrictions on church construction and legalization, including the implementation of Law No. 80 of 2016 and equal, nondiscriminatory procedures for constructing and using places of worship;
   c. impunity for anti-Coptic violence and the use of extrajudicial reconciliation procedures in place of criminal accountability and effective remedies;
   d. reported disappearances and allegations of religious coercion affecting Coptic women and girls, including deficiencies in investigations and safeguards;
   e. legal and administrative measures threatening the autonomy, governance, and continued religious use of living Christian heritage sites.

2. **Urge competent Egyptian authorities to provide concrete protections for Saint Catherine's Monastery's legal status and autonomy, including:**
   a. Respecting the Monastery's centuries-old status quo of ownership, possession, governance, and worship. Egypt should cease its efforts to replace the Brotherhood's historic property rights with a limited or revocable permission to use the site for religious purposes.
   b. Rejecting any settlement that alters that status quo without the monastic Brotherhood's free and informed consent. Neither litigation nor administrative pressure should be used to transfer control of the Monastery or its lands to the state, diminish the Brotherhood's authority, or impose an agreement negotiated on its behalf without its approval.

c. Prompt issuance of a presidential decree granting Egyptian citizenship to the Abbot in compliance with long-standing precedent;
d. Compliance with the World Heritage Committee Decision 48 COM 7B.4 and UNESCO recommendations before further development proceeds.

3. **Recommend that the President consider negotiating a binding agreement with Egypt, pursuant to 22 U.S.C. § 6445(c), that addresses identified policies or practices constituting violations of religious freedom and a measurable plan to cease or phase out specific violations.**

4. **Incorporate independent verification of religious freedom representations made through foreign-government lobbying and public-diplomacy channels.**

CS urges the Department to direct OIRF, in coordination with the broader Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, and the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, to review relevant FARA disclosures when evaluating statements made on behalf of the Egyptian government. This process should assess official assurances against legislative developments, administrative practices, and independently documented incidents on the ground.

5. **Coordinate diplomatic access to trials and pretrial detention hearings involving alleged religious freedom violations.**

CS urges the Department to insist on meaningful access for U.S. Embassy personnel to observe trials and pretrial detention hearings, particularly in cases where legal provisions are used to prosecute peaceful religious belief, conversion, or expression. The Department, along with independent reports, has previously documented Egyptian authorities preventing foreign embassy representatives from observing such proceedings. Consistent with Egypt's constitutional guarantees and Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, public access must be the default, with restrictions limited to narrowly defined, legally justified exceptions. Unjustified denial of diplomatic observation should prompt formal diplomatic protests, public reporting, and consideration of restrictions on discretionary assistance and security cooperation under applicable U.S. law. Judicial transparency and due process must be measurable expectations of the U.S.–Egypt relationship.

To the U.S. Congress

1. **Request a detailed assessment of the implementation of human-rights requirements governing Egypt's FMF.**

CS urges the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations to request a detailed accounting of the State Department's implementation of the certification, withholding, and waiver requirements under applicable appropriations legislation, including Public Law No. 119-75, div. F, § 7041(a). CS further encourages that these assessments are undertaken annually for as long as U.S. assistance to Egypt remains subject to human-rights conditions, with particular attention to the Department's rationale for invoking waivers.

2. **Encourage congressional sponsorship of qualifying Egyptian prisoners of conscience through the DFP.**

CS urges Members of Congress, in coordination with the TLHRC, USCIRF, and participating CSOs, to adopt additional qualifying cases of Egyptian prisoners of conscience through the DFP and undertake sustained, targeted advocacy on their behalf.

3. **Restrict foreign lobbying activities representing states and entities implicated in severe religious freedom violations.**

CS urges Congress to examine and adopt restrictions on lobbying activities conducted on behalf of countries and entities listed on USCIRF's SWL or CPC lists. As the Commission, alongside independent experts and organizations, reveals the extent to which these activities can influence U.S. foreign policy, particularly policy on IRF issues, Congress should further examine the issue and enact appropriate restrictions that curb any undue influence.

VII. ANNEX: ADDITIONAL CASES

Case 1: On October 22, 2026, at approximately 6:00 a.m., a man entered the **Coptic Orthodox Church of the Virgin Mary** in Barak al-Khiyam, Kerdasa District, Giza, claiming he wanted to pray while carrying a bottle of gasoline concealed in a bag.[64] According to the Diocese of Central Giza, the perpetrator broke through the door of a ground-floor chapel and set fire to church curtains, damaging carpets and wooden Gospel stands. The fire was contained without injuries, and the suspect was arrested. The Ministry of Interior subsequently stated that three curtains and a carpet had been partially burned and promptly attributed the suspect's behavior to psychiatric disturbances.[65]

Case 2: On October 2, 2026, **Father Besanti Maurice**, a Coptic Orthodox priest serving the Church of the Virgin Mary and St. Abanoub in Shubra El-Kheima, Qalyubia, was verbally and physically assaulted while driving through Ezbet Osman, where a wedding celebration had congested the street.[66] After his vehicle accidentally brushed against a motorcycle, its driver reportedly insulted and pushed the priest. The attacker also forcibly removed the cross from the priest's neck and threw it away. The Ministry of Interior disputed this account, stating that the cross fell during the altercation and that no injuries occurred. Police identified and arrested the suspect within hours using surveillance footage, and prosecutors opened an investigation.[67]

Case 3: On April 14, 2026, **Peter Kamel**, an Egyptian novelist from Mallawi, Minya, reported to National Security headquarters in response to an official summons and was detained and forcibly disappeared until appearing before prosecutors on April 22. He was charged in Case No. 1184 of 2026 with exploiting religion to promote extremist ideas and contempt of the Abrahamic religions through the internet. According to the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms and the Law and Democracy Support Foundation, the prosecution relied on Kamel's personal beliefs, social media publications, and literary writings, including his novel *Farewell, My Dear God*.[68] Investigators also examined his private correspondence and electronic files. On

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[64] Al Manassa News Desk, "Fire at Giza Church Extinguished after Man Enters with Gasoline," *Al Manassa*, October 22, 2026, https://almanassa.com/en/news/34562.

[65] Anadolu Agency, "الداخلية المصرية: توقيف مضطرب نفسي تسبب في حريق جزئي بكنيسة," October 22, 2026, https://h.aa.com.tr/ar/4097694/مصر/الداخلية-المصرية-توقيف-مضطرب-نفسي-تسبب-في-حريق-جزئي-بكنيسة.

[66] *Watani International*, Nader Shukry and Michael Girgis, "Assailant of Shubral-Kheima Coptic Priest Caught, Investigations Ongoing," October 4, 2026, https://en.wataninet.com/coptic-affairs-coptic-affairs/sectarian/assailant-of-shubral-kheima-coptic-priest-caught-investigations-ongoing/50017/.

[67] *Masrawy*, "تفاصيل خناقة شبرا.. حقيقة فيديو التعدي على قس ونزع الصليب منه بالقليوبية," October 4, 2026, https://www.masrawy.com/news/news_cases/details/2026/10/4/3057828/تفاصيل-خناقة-شبرا-حقيقة-فيديو-التعدي-على-قس-ونزع-الصليب-منه-بالقليوبية.

[68] Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms and Law and Democracy Support Foundation, "Detention of Novelist Peter Tawfik Kamel over His Views and Literary Work Violates Freedom of Thought and Artistic Expression," September 18, 2026, https://www.ec-rf.net/detention-of-novelist-peter-tawfik-kamel-over-his-views-and-literary-work-violates-freedom-of-thought-and-artistic-expression/.

September 17, the Mallawi Criminal Court renewed his pretrial detention for another 15 days. No subsequent outcome was identified in the sources reviewed for this statement.

Case 4: On May 2, 2025, a fire destroyed **St. George Coptic Orthodox Church** in Qift, Qena Governorate, causing the roof to collapse and destroying the church's contents. Although prosecutors subsequently authorized the removal of the fire debris, the church remained unable to obtain permission to rebuild.[69] In April 2026, local residents reported that the Qift City Council had refused the reconstruction permit on the grounds that the approximately 1,000-square-meter site was unsuitable for a church, despite its longstanding religious use.[70] Church representatives reportedly appealed to the Qena governor, who repeatedly referred the matter back to the local council. The church served more than 10,000 local Copts, who continued worshipping amid the damaged structure under temporary fabric coverings. On April 3, Bishop Sheroubim of Qena presided over a liturgy at the site while reconstruction remained stalled.

Case 5: On March 27, 2026, a group led by Roqia Gharib entered a protected **archaeological area near St. Bishoy Monastery** in Wadi el-Natrun, Beheira, amid a dispute over approximately 68 feddans of land.[71] The area, administered by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, contains remains of early Coptic monasteries, including a fourth- to sixth-century monastic complex recently uncovered by archaeologists. Authorities intervened, and the matter was referred to prosecutors under Case No. 1652 of 2026. According to St. Bishoy Monastery's statement, workers and personnel at the archaeological site tried to stop the encroachment and were assaulted; three workers were reportedly injured. Security authorities intervened, detained Gharib and several companions, and the encroachment was removed.[72]

The Wadi el-Natrun prosecution continued investigations on March 28 while prosecutors ordered the Survey Directorate to inspect the disputed parcel and determine its boundaries and legal status. Later reporting states that an April 22 survey committee met and concluded that the entirety of the parcel under inspection was archaeological land. By June and July, lawyers described two related court tracks involving allegations of assault against workers and encroachment on the archaeological land.

Case 6: On October 22, 2025, residents in Nazlet Gelf, Minya attacked Coptic homes and farm structures. This follows multiple posts and videos that appeared to spread a rumor accusing a Christian young man of kidnapping a Muslim girl, inciting violence against the Coptic community and its local church. Marching mobs of residents threw bricks at multiple Coptic

[69] Watani, "حريق هائل يلتهم كنيسة مارجرجس الأثرية بقفط، محافظة قنا," edited and republished by Coptic Solidarity, May 2, 2025, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2025/05/02/حريق-هائل-يلتهم-كنيسة-مارجرجس-الأثرية/.

[70] Nader Shukry, "محافظة قنا ترفض منح التراخيص.. قداس «جمعة ختام الصوم» بين الرماد وأقباط قفط يصلّون داخل كنيسة مارجرجس المحترقة انتظارًا لإعادة الإعمار," Copts United, April 4, 2026, https://www.copts-united.com/Article.php?A=859924&I=6237.

[71] Nader Shukry, "نيابة وادي النطرون انتهت من استكمال التحقيق حول التعدي على أرض «الأديرة المطمورة» وفى انتظار القرار الرسمي," Watani, March 28, 2026, https://www.wataninet.com/2026/03/نيابة-وادي-النطرون-انتهت-من-استكمال-ال/.

[72] Nader Shukry, "توضيح من دير الأنبا بيشوي بشأن التعدي على أرض الأديرة المطمورة الخاضعة لهيئة الآثار," *Copts United*, March 28, 2026, https://www.copts-united.com/Article.php?I=6228&A=859103.

homes and set fire to a number of Christian families' huts on agricultural land.[73] EIPR reports that Coptic residents were confined to their homes in fear for days. On October 24, a reconciliation session was set at the Mayor's house, in coordination with the Governorate security authorities, and attended by residents, senior security officials, the village priest, the accused Christian man's grandfather, and a few Christian residents. The customary arbitration committee decided the following:[74]

a. The Christian youth's family was required to pay EGP 1 million under the settlement;
b. a further EGP 2 million penalty would apply to any party violating the agreement;
c. the agreement would not terminate criminal proceedings against the young man;
d. the parties are prohibited from posting about the incident on social media.

EIPR has confirmed that, although unannounced in the committee's public decision, the Christian man's family were displaced from the village and had to sell their property.

Case 7: On October 22, 2025, **Hani Sobhi**,[75] a Coptic researcher, journalist, and novelist, was arrested by Egyptian security forces at his residence in El-Marg, Cairo, reportedly following a satirical Facebook post criticizing President el-Sisi. After approximately two days in undisclosed custody, Sobhi appeared before the Supreme State Security Prosecution in Case No. 7143 of 2025, facing charges of joining a terrorist organization and disseminating false news and information. Prosecutors initially ordered his detention for 15 days. His detention was repeatedly extended throughout 2026 despite objections from human rights organizations concerning the prosecution of his peaceful expression. On October 19, 2026, a court renewed his pretrial detention for another 45 days in connection with his published writings.[76]

Case 8: On September 9, 2025, **Demiana Ghali**, a 24-year-old Coptic woman from Tahnsha, Minya, was reported missing.[77] The following day, despite active participation in church life, her official identification documents were changed to declare her as Muslim. Church leaders contacted security authorities after her disappearance and were told a search was underway. However, procedures to change her identity documents were already being completed. The conversion certificate listed her conversion date as July 16, 2025, nearly two months before her

[73] Coptic Solidarity, "From Rumor to Rampage: The Collective Punishment of Egypt's Coptic Christians," October 26, 2025, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2025/10/26/from-rumor-to-rampage-the-collective-punishment-of-egypts-coptic-christians/.
[74] EIPR, "Beni Mazar Attacks: State Officials' Participation in Imposing 'Customary' Punishments Entrenches Sectarianism," October 27, 2025, https://eipr.org/en/press/2025/10/beni-mazar-attacks-state-officials-participation-imposing-customary-punishments.
[75] Committee for Justice, "Egypt: Committee for Justice Documents Arrest of Researcher and Journalist Hani Sobhi, Calls for His Release," October 27, 2025, https://www.cfjustice.org/egypt-committee-for-justice-documents-arrest-of-researcher-and-journalist-hani-sobhi-calls-for-his-release/.
[76] Tibyan for Human Rights, "النشرة القانونية لتبيان للحقوق والحريات: أكتوبر 2026," November 2, 2026, https://tbian.org/النشرة-القانونية-لتبيان-للحق-أكتوبر-2026/.
[77] Coptic Solidarity, "Family of 'Disappeared' Coptic Woman Face Renewed Detentions."

disappearance, despite her continued participation in Christian church activities during that time. No subsequent outcome was identified in the sources reviewed for this statement.

Case 9: On March 24, 2025, **Demiana Ishaq**,[78] a 28-year-old Coptic woman and mother of a two-year-old boy, disappeared under unclear circumstances in Ezbet El-Nakhl, Cairo. According to her family, Ishaq had left her home to purchase household necessities and was last seen boarding a tuk-tuk. Her mobile phone subsequently became unreachable, and relatives were unable to determine her whereabouts. The family filed report No. 1388 at Al-Khusus Police Station and publicly appealed to the Ministry of Interior to investigate her disappearance and facilitate her safe return. About two weeks after her disappearance, a person claiming to know Demiana's whereabouts reached out to her cousin and informed her that Demiana would allegedly soon be sent to Libya with three other girls.[79] Since then, reporting did not establish her whereabouts or the cause of her disappearance.

Case 10: In early May 2024, **Yusuf Saad Haneen**,[80] a military conscript, exchanged private messages about religion with a Muslim individual on Messenger during his vacation from service. After excerpts of the exchange were circulated publicly, and upon Haneen's return to the Central Security camp, he was taken blindfolded to a National Security office, beaten and insulted during interrogation, and asked about the names of any Coptic preachers or organizations he affiliated with. On July 28, a military court sentenced Haneen to three years in prison in Case No. 4019 of 2024 for "committing behavior that is harmful to the order, rules and requirements of the military system." On November 13, 2024, an appeals court rejected Haneen's request and upheld the sentence.[81]

Case 11: On April 26, 2024, hundreds of residents marched in protest of the construction of a licensed **Evangelical church in el-Kom el-Ahmar Village**, Maghagha District, Minya, where they threw stones at several Coptic homes and damaged three cars.[82] When they arrived at the planned construction plot, they damaged construction materials and the recently dug excavation for the church foundations. The attacks came despite promises by residents and security forces that it could be built safely.[83] The situation was controlled approximately one hour after the attack began.

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[78] *Watani*, "اختفاء قبطية (٢٨ سنة) بعزبة النخل," republished by Coptic Solidarity, April 5, 2025, https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2025/04/05/اختفاء-قبطية-٢٨-سنة-بعزبة-النخل/.

[79] *Christian Dogma*, "عاجل | تطور مرعب في اختفاء دميانة فرح إسحاق.. رسائل غامضة تكشف مخطط تهريبها إلى ليبيا خلال أيام," April 5, 2025, https://www.christian-dogma.com/2260360.

[80] EIPR, "Military Court Sentences Conscript to Three Years in Prison over Remarks 'Offensive to Islam'; EIPR Files a Grievance," July 29, 2024, https://eipr.org/en/press/2024/07/military-court-sentences-conscript-three-years-prison-over-remarks-offensive-islam.

[81] EIPR, "المحكمة العسكرية ترفض الاستئناف وتقر حبس المجند يوسف حنين بزعم «ازدراء الأديان»," November 13, 2024, https://eipr.org/press/2024/11/المحكمة-العسكرية-ترفض-الاستئناف-وتقر-حبس-المجند-يوسف-حنين-بزعم-ازدراء-الأديان.

[82] Christian Solidarity Worldwide, "Extremists Attack Church Construction Site in Upper Egypt," April 30, 2024, https://www.cswusa.org/2024/04/30/press/6217/.

[83] Marian Magdy, "الكنيسة حاصلة على تصريح رسمي التفاصيل الكاملة لأحداث الكوم الأحمر بعد سيطرة الأمن," صوت المسيحي الحر (Light Dark), April 30, 2024, https://www.light-dark.net/الكنيسة-حاصلة-على-تصريح-رسمي-التفاصيل/.