

**ESCALATING VIOLENCE AGAINST COPTIC WOMEN  
AND GIRLS: WILL THE NEW EGYPT BE MORE  
DANGEROUS THAN THE OLD?**

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**HEARING**  
BEFORE THE  
**COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND  
COOPERATION IN EUROPE**  
ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS  
SECOND SESSION

JULY 18, 2012

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**COMMISSIONERS**

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## **ESCALATING VIOLENCE AGAINST COPTIC WOMEN AND GIRLS: WILL THE NEW EGYPT BE MORE DANGEROUS THAN THE OLD?**

July 18, 2012

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE  
WASHINGTON, DC

The hearing was held at 2 p.m. in room 210, Cannon House Office Building, Washington, DC, Hon. Christopher H. Smith, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding.

*Commissioners present:* Hon. Christopher H. Smith, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and Hon. Robert Aderholt, Commissioner, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

*Witnesses present:* Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, Chair, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom; Michele Clark, Adjunct Professor, Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University; Dr. Walid Phares, Co-Secretary General, The Transatlantic Legislative Group on Counterterrorism; and "Anne," a Coptic Christian from Egypt and Attempted Kidnap Victim.

### **HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, CHAIRMAN, COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

Mr. SMITH. The Commission will come to order. And good afternoon and welcome to our hearing on the escalating violence facing Coptic women and girls in Egypt following the Arab Spring, including the outrageous crime of abduction, forced conversion and which the Egyptian government, both old and new, is doing all too little about, if anything at all. It has now been almost a year and a half since the revolution began in Egypt and Egypt is still in the foundry fires of transition, hopefully into a free and democratic state. The Egyptians have elected a parliament but the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, or SCAF, dissolved it with the support of the constitutional court.

As president, Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood was elected and installed but not before the SCAF, who seemed to be mostly secularists, curtailed presidential power over the military and given the military legislative powers. The constituent panel, which was drawn from the now-dissolved parliament and has been boycotted by the Coptic Christians, began drafting work on Egypt's new constitution. Yet it may be disbanded any day by a pending

court decision. Order seems to hang by a thread and tensions run extremely high. Though Egypt has avoided civil war, the revolution and ongoing unrest and social conflict have already left many casualties in the Coptic community which makes up almost eight percent of Egypt's population. Sadly, there are groups that would use the ancient Christian Coptic community as a way to build unity around a common enemy.

The SCAF was guilty of this on October 9th, 2011, when the military fired on a peaceful group of Coptic Christians in Maspero and ran them over with military vehicles while calling through the national news service for honorable citizens to defend the army against attack. That is, the SCAF openly invited violence against the Coptic community. Twenty-seven people were killed and more than 300 injured. Almost all of them were Copts. The military claimed that one soldier was killed but it refuses to release his name. Almost a year later, protestors are on trial for the incident and three soldiers have been charged with only misdemeanors.

As we will hear today from Michele Clark and her new report on the disappearance, forced marriages and forced conversions of Coptic women, the vulnerability and abduction of Coptic Christians is not new. Going back to the 1970s, there were many accounts of Coptic women and girls being abducted by Muslims, forcibly conducted and forcibly married. There are many such reports, no doubt. Some of them were of women choosing to elope, marry across religious lines and cut off relations with their family. But the claim of the Egyptian government that this is the story of every one of the thousands of disappeared women and girls absolutely defies the evidence. The women and girls are found—who are found claim to have been drugged and kidnapped or kidnapped with violence. They often report human rights abuses including forced conversion, rape, forced marriages, beatings and domestic servitude.

Alarming, since the revolution, cases of—since the revolution, cases of reported disappearance have increased while recovery of the women and girls have decreased. Those women who are found and returned to their families face many obstacles including government refusals to change their identity cards to reflect their return to their Christian faith, which seems to sanction forced conversions. Nor are we aware of any case before or after the revolution in which an abductor has been prosecuted.

President Morsi in his first speech as president envisioned Egypt as being for Muslims and Christians. This must mean true justice for Copts. Copts must be given equal protection under the law. Secretary Clinton was in Egypt over the weekend facing protestors with signs that said, quote, “Obama, don't send your dollars to jihadists.” Congress sent the same message with the 2012 Consolidated Appropriations Act which required the secretary to certify that Egypt was making improvements in religious freedom before we released the \$1.3 billion in aid.

An unnamed senior State Department official reported to Reuters that on the basis of American national security interests, she—meaning Secretary Clinton—will waive the legislative conditions related to Egypt's democratic transition, allowing for the continued flow of foreign military financing to Egypt. “The move reflects,” the quote goes on to say from the unnamed official, “the move reflects

our overarching goal to maintain our strategic partnership with an Egypt made stronger and more stable by a successful transition to democracy.”

This is democracy? My response is simply this. Unless Coptic women and girls are protected and free to live their lives without fear of abduction, forced conversion and other gross abuses of their human rights, Egypt will not be strong, will not be stable or a successful democracy.

I'd like to begin now with our first witness. We have—and we thank her for being here today—Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, who is an expert on human rights. She received a B.A. in political science from Yale, her J.D. from the University of California Hastings College of Law, and her Ph.D. in history from the University of Southern Denmark. She has worked extensively with the U.S. Congress to advocate for human rights, particularly while serving as deputy counsel to the criminal justice subcommittee.

She teaches human rights and American foreign policy at Tufts University, serves as the president and CEO of the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice—named after her very distinguished father, who we all deeply miss—and was recently elected as chair of the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom. Dr. Lantos Swett, welcome, and please proceed as you would like.

**DR. KATRINA LANTOS SWETT, CHAIR, UNITED STATES  
COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

Dr. SWETT. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. And I want to say before I go into my prepared remarks that you are one of the colleagues my father admired most. Literally one can't number the times that the two of you were in the trenches side by side battling on behalf of human rights for people in every corner of the world.

And my father would often cite you to me and to others as an example of the way in which people who might be in very different places on some political issues could come together and have really no daylight between them on the most fundamental issues of human dignity and human rights. And so it's a real privilege and an honor for me to be here before you today. And thank you for the excellent work that you're doing.

My testimony is going to focus more broadly on the challenges and threats to the Coptic community in Egypt and I know subsequently you'll be getting some very powerful testimony more specifically on the issue of abduction.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today before the Helsinki Commission on the topic of “Escalating Violence Against Coptic Women and Girls: Will the New Egypt Be More Dangerous Than the Old?” I have been asked today to give an overview about the general status of, and conditions for, religious freedom in Egypt, especially for Coptic Christians, and I request that my statement be entered into the record.

Mr. SMITH. Without objection, so ordered.

Dr. SWETT. Since its inception nearly 15 years ago, USCIRF has been deeply engaged on Egypt and for good reason. For our entire existence, and indeed, prior to our creation, religious freedom conditions, including those of Egypt's Coptic population, have been ex-

tremely problematic. This situation continues into the present and with the election of Mohammed Morsi, the first freely elected president of Egypt, on June 30th. The Egyptian transitional government continues to engage in and tolerate systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of freedom of religious freedom.

Discriminatory and repressive laws and policies remain that restrict freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief. Given these concerns, and for the second year in a row, USCIRF recommended in its 2012 annual report, which I have here, by the way, and I'd be delighted to leave with you for the Commission—USCIRF recommended that Egypt be designated a country of particular concern, or CPC, under the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act. I also request that USCIRF's 2012 annual report chapter on Egypt be entered into the record.

Mr. SMITH. Without objection.

Dr. SWETT. Thank you. From the evidence we have seen, the biggest problem faced by the Copts, who comprise 10 to 15 percent of Egypt's 80 million people, continues to be one of impunity. Simply stated, for decades, Egypt's government has fostered a climate conducive to acts of violence against Copts and members of other minority communities. It has done so in at least two ways. First, Cairo's long history of restrictive laws and policies—from blasphemy codes to an emergency law to across-the-board discrimination—has drawn unwelcome attention to religious minorities, further marginalizing them and leading to violent words and deeds launched by intolerant individuals as well as by radical religious groups.

Second, the government's continued failure to protect innocent people from these attacks and to convict those responsible has served to encourage further assaults. For years, President Mubarak's government tolerated widespread discrimination against religious minorities and disfavored religious groups, from dissident Sunni and Shia Muslims to Baha'is, as well as Copts and other Christians, while allowing state-controlled media and state-funded mosques to deliver incendiary messages against them. The consequences of the climate of impunity are especially apparent in Upper Egypt.

After Mubarak's departure, a breakdown in security and a rise in sectarian violence made 2011 one of the worst years for Copts and other minorities. Last year alone, violent sectarian attacks killed approximately 100 people, surpassing the death toll of the previous 10 years combined. As during the Mubarak regime, Copts were the primary target, and most of the perpetrators still have not been brought to justice. Perpetrators have not been convicted or alleged perpetrators have been detained for short periods, but eventually released without charge. While USCIRF's 2012 annual report chapter on Egypt includes a list of some of the most tragic acts of violence committed against the Coptic Orthodox community, I do want to note the following significant incident, which you also referred to.

Last October, Egypt's state media falsely accused Copts of attacking the military when Muslim and Christian protestors marched toward the state television station. Following the state media's call on civilians to counter this imaginary threat, on Octo-



ber 9th, in downtown Cairo, armed men attacked peaceful demonstrators, killing at least 26 of them, most of them Copts, while injuring over 300 more.

Responding to the violence, Egypt's military used live ammunition and also deployed armored vehicles that deliberately crushed and killed at least 12 protestors. In addition, reports in recent years support claims that there were cases of Muslim men forcing Coptic Christian women to convert to Islam. The State Department has asserted that such cases are often disputed and include, quote, "inflammatory allegations and categorical denials of kidnapping and rape." For example, there were credible cases in which Coptic girls did voluntarily convert to Islam to marry Muslim men, and subsequently, when the relationship failed, sought to return to Christianity, as is their right under international law. Nevertheless, during the reporting period, experts and human rights groups have found that there were also credible cases where Coptic Christian women were lured deceptively into marriages with Muslim men and forced to convert to Islam. According to these reports, if a woman returns or escapes from the marriage and wants to convert back to Christianity, she faces the same legal hurdles in changing her religious affiliation on official identity documents as discussed.

In recent years, in response to sectarian violence, Egyptian authorities have conducted, quote, "reconciliation sessions" between Muslims and Christians as a way of easing tensions and resolving disputes. In some cases, authorities compelled victims to abandon their claims to any legal remedy. USCIRF has stated that reconciliation efforts should not be used to undermine enforcing the law and punishing perpetrators for wrongdoing. In recent years, the State Department concluded that reconciliation sessions not only, quote, "prevented the prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against Copts and precluded their recourse to the judicial system for restitution," but also "contributed to a climate of impunity that encouraged further assaults," and how ironic it is that something so benignly termed as a reconciliation process should be used actually to strip people of their legal rights and a means of vindicating those rights.

For all Christian groups, government permission is required to build a new church or repair an existing one, and the approval process for church construction is time-consuming and inflexible. Former President Mubarak had the authority to approve applications for new construction of churches. Although most of these applications were submitted more than five years ago, the majority have not received a response. Even some permits that have been approved cannot, in fact, be acted upon because of interference by the state security services at both the local and national levels.

In 2005, former President Mubarak devolved authority to approve the renovation and reconstruction of churches from the president to the country's governors. Several years later, some churches continue to face delays in the issuance of permits. Even in cases where approval to build or maintain churches has been granted, many Christians complain that local security services have prevented construction or repair, in some cases for many years.

In addition, local security services have been accused of being complicit in inciting violence against some churches undergoing routine maintenance or repair. In recent years, the government repeatedly has pledged, most recently in October of 2011, to adopt a new law that would apply to all places of worship.

In June, after consulting with religious leaders and other experts, the SCAF released publicly a draft version of the law. The draft was criticized widely by Muslims, Christians and Egyptian human rights groups. While a subsequent version has not been made public, some reports have indicated that the revised draft law covers only churches and not other places of worship.

Now, this is not to say there has been no progress since the end of the Mubarak regime. To be sure, we have seen some hopeful developments. Last year, the Grand Sheikh at al-Azhar began several initiatives expressing support for some aspects of freedom of religion or belief. In May of last year, the government began to reopen more than 50 churches that had been closed, in some cases for years.

Last July, the Supreme Administrative Court ruled that converts to Christianity could obtain new national identity documents indicating their Christianity but not their former Muslim faith. And following the October violence, the transitional government took steps to reduce discrimination in Egypt's penal code.

Yet despite this progress, the bottom line is this: Copts need to be protected, Copts aren't being protected and Copts must be protected, along with every other member of Egyptian society, from attacks on their right to order their lives and practice their beliefs in dignity and peace.

As long as Copts and other religious minorities aren't being sufficiently protected, USCIRF will continue to spotlight the problem and recommend that the U.S. government take strong action in support of religious freedom. Our recommendations to the United States government are as follows.

First, the United States should press Egypt to improve religious freedom conditions, by repealing discriminatory decrees against religious minorities, removing religion from official identity documents, abolishing the blasphemy codes and passing a unified law for the construction and repair of places of worship.

Second, the United States should urge Egypt's government to prosecute government-funded clerics, government officials or any other individuals who incite violence, while disciplining or dismissing government-funded clerics who preach intolerance and hatred.

Third, the United States should increase pressure on Egypt to bring to justice those who have committed violence against fellow Egyptians on account of their religion.

Fourth, the U.S. Congress should require the departments of State and Defense to report every 90 days on the Egyptian government's progress pertaining to religious freedom and related rights.

Fifth, until genuine progress occurs, USCIRF renews its call for the United States to designate Egypt a country of particular concern as one of the world's most serious religious freedom abusers.

Sixth, if Egypt demonstrates a commitment to progress on freedom of religion and related rights, the United States should ensure

that a portion of its military aid to Egypt is used to help Egypt's police implement a plan to enhance protection for religious minorities, their places of worship and places where they congregate.

And finally, Washington should press Cairo to ensure that a new constitution has robust protections for the right to freedom of religion or belief consistent with international human rights law, including recognizing the universal right to the freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief for every individual and every religious or belief community. Recognizing that each person's freedom to hold and to manifest any religion or belief or to not hold any religious belief should not be limited aside from the narrow exceptions delineated in international law.

Three, affirming that the right to freedom of religion or belief includes the right to have, adopt or change one's religion or belief without coercion and to manifest it publicly as well as to persuade others to change their beliefs or affiliations voluntarily.

Ensuring that the rights and benefits of citizenship are not limited to individuals belonging to particular religious communities and ensuring that all persons are equal before the law and are entitled to the equal protection of law regardless of religion or belief and that guaranteeing all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on religious grounds.

Today, as Egypt confronts the rigors of democratic transition, will it uphold the rights of Copts and other religious minorities? The world is watching, the Helsinki Commission is watching and USCIRF is watching, too. Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

Mr. SMITH. Dr. Lantos Swett, thank you so very much for your very eloquent testimony and the large number of recommendations, insights that you and the Commission have provided and have done so for since the inception of the Commission, so thank you for it, especially as its chair, for taking your tremendous leadership.

I do want to note we've been joined by Robert Aderholt—Commissioner Aderholt—and I think it's worth nothing and celebrating that at the most recent OSCE parliamentary assembly, Mr. Aderholt was elected vice president of the OSCE PA. So congratulations to you.

Dr. SWETT. Congratulations. Thank you so much.

Mr. SMITH. And if I could just ask a couple of quick questions?

Dr. SWETT. Yes, of course.

Mr. SMITH. I know you're on a tight—just briefly about the—one of your recommendations is that the—Egypt ought to be designated as a country of particular concern. By way of historical reminder, Congressman Frank Wolf's bill, the International Religious Freedom Act, which was vigorously opposed by the State Department—John Shattuck, who was then the assistant secretary for democracy, labor and human rights, testified before my committee repeatedly against the bill.

But one of the geniuses of that legislation was that it established this independent voice to speak truth to power without worrying about the problems that are associated when you talk to dictatorships or authoritarian regimes which often muzzles our voice as a country, especially on human rights issues, and religious freedom being at the top of that list. You're kind of like the GAO of—

Dr. SWETT. Exactly.

Mr. SMITH. —religious freedom.

Dr. SWETT. I like that description.

Mr. SMITH. And you do a wonderful job.

Dr. SWETT. But we don't go on wild trips to Las Vegas, I'm happy to say. [Chuckles.]

Mr. SMITH. But you know, with regards to CPC, if you could maybe elaborate a bit on the frustration that the Commission has had with getting the administration to so designate—it's a two-step—first designate based on what the record is and then decide what if, if any, of the 18 prescribed remedies or penalties that can be meted out to a country—in this case Egypt—might be used. China has been on that list.

Unfortunately, we rarely use any of those sanctions that are included. But it's important to first get the designation and then take the second step.

What do we do with that designation?

Secondly, if I could ask you with regards to—you know, you talked about the reconciliation sessions in your testimony. And while they sound benign and look like, you know, there's something good and wholesome about it, they also carry with it a very dangerous aspect where people who have created heinous crimes under pressure of a reconciliation session might be allowed to get away with it, whether it be rape or assault. And so, what kind of actions are often brought to these reconciliation sessions.

And thirdly, if you could, I mentioned in my opening about how hard we worked—Mr. Aderholt, Mr. Wolf, Trent Franks, Kay Granger, who was the key person as chairwoman of the foreign ops appropriations committee—to put very specific language into the foreign ops bill for this year on religious freedom. It was opposed by the administration. As a matter of fact, it was very vigorously opposed. And yet, now it's been waived, just shunted aside as if religious freedom doesn't matter.

And when statements are made about strategic partnership with Egypt to make it stronger as a democracy, religious freedom is the first human right. It's at the core of it. If we won't insist upon it, who will? So if you can speak to that very briefly.

And then finally, for years when President Mubarak would come here, I and others would meet with him and I would bring up two issues every time—the gross abuse of his media to attack Israel and use caricatures and very, very horrible statements about—that were anti-Semitic, and the second was the attack on the Coptic Christian community and church.

But as you point out, there has been a breakdown in security and a rise of sectarian violence that makes 2011 one of the worst years for Copts and other minorities. What would you recommend we do because, you know, we would get a pushback from Mubarak. He would say, talk to Boutros-Ghali where, who was always with him when these issues would come up. And we would give names. We would raise specific instances of violence against Coptic Christians, burning of churches and the like. But he at least was responsive to some. What kind of response are we getting? What would be your recommendation as to with the SCAF especially and with the

president? Are we insisting on it with this administration? Are they insisting on religious freedom and protection of Copts?

Dr. SWETT. Well, thank you for those excellent questions and I'll try to address each of them in turn. First, as it relates to the CPC designation, we share your frustration. It was a stroke of genius, I believe, that USCIRF was created as an independent body because we have, if you will, the luxury of being able to have a single-minded focus on our mission which is the advancement and promotion of international religious freedom.

And as such, you know, frankly we believe that we see this issue with greater clarity. The State Department is always in the process of weighing various interests. And we understand that that's a necessity given the magnitude of the issues that they have to deal with. And yet, it is our firm conviction that, as you have said so often and so eloquently, religious freedom is a threshold issue.

And the implications—the broader implications for a society that fails to provide an environment of robust protection for tolerance, pluralism and religious freedom are very grave. The evidence is now out there and it's overwhelming that the positive correlations for societies that do provide this kind of religious freedom protection are phenomenal. They are more stable. They are more prosperous.

They have—the women in those societies have infinitely higher status, infinitely better circumstances. They are more democratic. And of course, they are more peaceful. And so, this is really not a sidebar issue. I would also say that, as you know, Mr. Chairman, the conduct of a country needs to be egregious and persistent in order to qualify for that CPC designation. And we approach our monitoring function at USCIRF always in a sort of strictly factual way. You know, it's nothing but the facts, ma'am.

We go in there looking at what are the facts on the ground, what are the actual circumstances and then we make our recommendations based on that. And so, you know, all I can say is that we will continue to forcefully advocate with the State Department that they take that next step vis-à-vis Egypt. The facts, we believe, warrant it. The circumstances warrant it. And I think the evidence is the country doesn't want to be designated as a CPC with good reason. And so, you know, when a country is obviously against their wishes given this badge of certainly concern, of particular concern, it can serve as a motivation for them to actually get serious about addressing the issues. And as you point out, CPC designation is not an automatic trigger for any particular set of consequences. So that issue can be viewed sort of as part of a separate discussion, what are the appropriate sanctions. But we strongly feel that the CPC designation is warranted.

We feel that it is an important tool to hold up for the world to see what the practices are of a country and it can be a tool for, you know, finally forcing a country to get serious about addressing some of these issues. You brought up the issue of the reconciliation sessions.

You know, we have had now over the last several decades societies in which a truth and reconciliation process has played an enormously valuable role in trying to help societies that were riven and torn apart in the most profound ways by war, by apartheid,

by, you know, decades of sort of saturated abuse in the society to find a way to move beyond that. And so, there are obviously circumstances in which that kind of a process is very, very appropriate. The situation I think we have in Egypt that is of concern is that you are really sort of seeing these reconciliation processes in some instances used not to try and sort of heal the deep societal-wide wounds but to bully victims into abandoning their pursuit of justice for very specific ills done against them by very specific perpetrators.

And that's clearly a perversion and an abuse of a process and sort of putting a very attractive and appealing name on a process which we feel feeds into the culture of impunity. As you know, in my remarks I address that that's sort of the overarching problem, if we want to put a big tag on what we feel lies at the heart of religious freedom in Egypt. It's this impunity, this culture of impunity created by government policies and by government lack of vindication of the rights of their citizens.

And so in that context, this reconciliation process is another piece of that impunity problem. You know, you mention the specific language that you had battled so hard to get into the foreign operations bill. And I don't, you know, know that I have huge insight to bring to bear on that. I do know that it is important from the perspective of USCIRF that whether it's the president, whether it's the State Department, we want to see more than inconsequential lip service to the issues of religious freedom.

You know, nobody is going to stand up and speak out against religious freedom. And we can all go to the record and find, you know, well-meaning and moving words spoken. But there needs to be more than that. And there needs to be a prioritization of religious freedom. I don't need to tell you, you know better than I do, that religious freedom is really implicated in some of our nation's greatest challenges right now, including some of the national security threats that we face.

Again, societies where robust religious freedom is a reality tend not to be societies where the sort of violent religious extremism takes root that can then visit our shores in the form of terrorism and can implicate our national security interests around the globe. So it's not a minor issue. It's not a nice sidebar topic that makes us all feel good and we can kind of, you know, smile and say nice words. This goes to the heart not only of American values but of American security in the world. And so in that sense, you know, we would obviously be advocating for our State Department and this administration and the Congress to ensure that religious freedom is central to the way we approach our dealings with foreign countries.

And finally, you know, it's interesting the last issue you brought up were your meetings with Mubarak and how you would bring up two issues—the treatment of the Copts and the use of official media to spew out, you know, vitriolic and vile anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial.

Just earlier today—and I'm now going to momentarily put on a different hat. As you mentioned, I'm the president of the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice. And one of our first acts after establishing the foundation following my father's passing was

the creation of the Lantos Archives on Anti-Semitism and Holocaust Denial, a collaborative project that we do with the Middle East Media Research Institute.

And that archive documents on an annual basis the degree to which so much of the media, the preaching, the teaching, the public discourse in much of the Arabic world, the Muslim world, the Farsi-speaking world is saturated with a degree of overt and vitriolic and hateful anti-Semitism that I really think would make most people's hair stand on end if they were to be exposed to it. and part of what we try to do through the archives is bridge the language gap because when these examples take place in a language not easily understood, you know, it's easy for it to pass under the radar screen.

And so, one of the goals of the Lantos Archives is bridge that language gap, bring to the attention of policymakers like you, the media, educators, thought leaders what's really going on because we do believe that shining a bright light on that is at least one step that we can take. But again, the quality of a culture—what is the language that is accepted, that is put forward, that is out there, what are the sorts of slurs against religious communities, against the Copts, against the Jews that are accepted as just part of the normal discourse.

Unless we change the fundamental nature of what is acceptable in these countries around the world, we cannot get at some of the deep, deep, intransigent problems that need to be solved for, you know, the peace and stability of the whole world. And so, I commend you for raising these issues. I think we need to be more vigilant as ever as we see Egypt and other countries attempting to make a transition to more democratic rule.

Democracy can have a big hole in the heart if it is not accompanied by rigorous, vigorous, constitutional protections for the sorts of fundamental human rights that we take so for granted in this country. And in that regard, I'll also mention that another initiative that USCIRF has been involved with is a study of constitutional reform processes and trying to, you know, provide some help and some insight to many of the countries in the Middle East that are now in the process of drafting new constitutions.

And we know that those constitutions won't look exactly like ours, although unlike some people in public life I think our Constitution is not a bad example to hold up around the world. It's done a pretty good job for this great country for more than 200 years. But democracy must be accompanied by strong and honored constitutional protections for fundamental rights. Otherwise, democracy can easily degenerate into the most dangerous sort of mobocracy.

Mr. SMITH. Dr. Lantos Swett, thank you so very much. I yield to the good friend and colleague, Commissioner Aderholt.

**HON. ROBERT B. ADERHOLT, COMMISSIONER, COMMISSION  
ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I'm going to have to slip out shortly. But I do have some questions I'd like to submit. I'd like unanimous consent to submit those for the record. Thank you for being here. Thank you for your testimony.

Dr. SWETT. Thank you.

Mr. ADERHOLT. This issue regarding Coptics has been an issue that I've followed for over a decade now. One thing that I do want to—I would like to get your opinion on and just your thoughts—when it comes to the severity of the issue that we're here discussing today, what do you think are some of the key issues or perceptions that—so many in the international community from understanding really what the problem really is and why they have not acted more strongly on the issue?

Dr. SWETT. Specifically on the issue of religious freedom or—

Mr. ADERHOLT. Or—and minority women, but just in general.

Dr. SWETT. Well, you know, I think that for many years there was sort of this notion that that world of religious belief and religious freedom related to kind of an older period in human history and that as we move forward into the modern world, some of those old, old notions of what's important fall away. And I think if recent world events have shown us anything, they have shown us how untrue that is.

Societies that protect these fundamental rights of belief and conscience—and sometimes those take the form of religious beliefs but not always—sometimes that takes the form of the freedom not to believe. Societies that are vigorous in protecting people's ability to express their transcendent views, their views about that which is transcendent in life, in fact are the societies that are the best equipped to deal with the many challenges that we face.

But I do think that you're right. There has been a certain resistance to embracing the advocacy of these issues other than in sort of a sidebar rhetorical sense. But as I say, you know, I'm really very encouraged by some of the new, you know, very concrete research and social science evidence that is coming forward to show the correlation and the interrelation between protecting some of these most fundamental rights and building successful, prosperous, stable, tolerant societies.

And so, you know, we take some comfort from that and hope that as, in a way, science and faith and practice and tradition come together, there will be a more vigorous community out there ready to stand up in defense of these most fundamental rights. They cannot be ignored. They cannot be set aside. They cannot be dismissed as sort of relics of another era. They are at the heart of how we build a decent and a safe world going forward. And you know, that is certainly central to the mission of USCIRF and something that we're very passionate about.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you. And you know, just going back to the fact that a lot of people I think are not even sure exactly—it's not really focused on some of the human rights issue about what the Coptics are all about and how some of the issues that they have to deal with. So again, I apologize for having to slip out. But like I said, I do have some questions for the record I would like to submit. So thank you very much.

Dr. SWETT. Thank you for your question.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Commissioner Aderholt. And thank you, Dr. Lantos Swett, for your testimony, your insights and recommendations. And thank you.



Dr. SWETT. Thank you for having me and thank you for holding this very important hearing.

Mr. SMITH. I'd like to now welcome our second panel to the witness table, beginning first with Michele Clark, an adjunct professor at the George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs. She's an internationally renowned expert on human trafficking. Ms. Clark was appointed director of the Anti-Trafficking Assistance Unit at the OSCE in 2005 and developed the groundbreaking publication "Working Papers on Combatting Trafficking in the OSCE Region."

She has received multiple awards and fellowships in recognition of her remarkable anti-trafficking work. And just several months ago was here before this Commission with some groundbreaking testimony, insights into the abduction of Coptic girls in Egypt, really laid out a challenge for us and especially for the executive branch. And I look forward to hearing what she has found since and she will explain that of course in her testimony.

We'll then hear from Dr. Phares—Walid Phares—who is a professor at the National Defense University and he serves as an advisor to the Anti-Terrorism Caucus and co-secretary general for the Transatlantic Legislative Group on Counterterrorism. Now, Dr. Phares frequently testifies before the U.S. Congress, the European Parliament and the United Nations Security Council on matters pertaining to international security. In addition, he provides expertise for a variety of domestic and international media sources and has published several books, including his most recent, "The Coming Revolution: Struggle for Freedom in the Middle East."

Then, our next witness, and we will just call her Anne, is a victim and needs to maintain anonymity for the safety of her family, who are still in Egypt. She is a Coptic Christian woman but recently obtained asylum here in the United States based on an attempted abduction that she endured while in Egypt. I would ask that each of you respect her privacy and not attempt to photograph her, even though she is behind us. We do have Capitol Police on hand to ensure that there are no disturbances. Her words will be translated by Carolyn Doss, who has been here before. And I thank her for that translation. If we could go first to Michele Clark and then to Dr. Phares?

**MICHELE CLARK, ADJUNCT PROFESSOR, ELLIOTT SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY**

Ms. CLARK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a real honor to be invited to testify once more. Thank you. It's an honor to be invited to testify once more on this most important issue of the disappearances, forced conversions and forced marriages of Coptic women and girls. I'd like to express my thanks to the Commission for holding this hearing and for launching our new report. It's a real honor that you've accorded us.

I would also like to express my appreciation and my thanks to Dr. John Eibner of Christian Solidarity International for championing this issue and sponsoring the research and writing of the report. I would also like to express my thanks to my coauthor, Nadia Ghaly, for her invaluable collaboration. She's not able to be

with us today. I have submitted written testimony along with the newly released report and would like these to be included in the permanent record of the hearings.

Mr. SMITH. Without objection, your full statement and that of Dr. Walid and all statements will be made a part of the record.

Ms. CLARK. Thank you. My introductory remarks will be brief, highlighting the principle conclusions and recommendations. But I'd also like to address some of the challenges raised by individuals and organizations who would seek to downplay the seriousness of the issue. First, a little bit of context and then the challenges. This report builds upon our previous work from 2009 in which we documented the disappearances of Coptic women and girl. Many were lured into false relationships through fraudulent means or forcible abductions.

These women were coerced into converting to Islam and married to their abductors against their wills. Our report was based on interviews with women who had been abducted, the lawyers who represented them and family members of women who had not yet returned.

But the report was greeted with some mixed response. We're grateful to you and to this Commission, which one year ago, as you mentioned, sponsored a hearing on this important topic to raise the visibility of violence against the Coptic women in Egypt. Other U.S. government bodies were not so receptive. In 2010, the Office to Combat and Monitor Trafficking in Persons referenced our study in their annual report although referring to our findings as allegations.

Findings of our current report were not referenced in the 2012 TIP report. The 2010 Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report also refers to our work, once again using the word allegation.

There have been some interesting traction in other areas. And for the first time, we're beginning to see stories in the mainstream media. In 2010, just before the Christmas holidays, the BBC aired a documentary film on attacks against Christian minorities in Europe, featuring a family whose daughter had been abducted. They based their research in large part on our first report. In July 2011, the New York Review of Books featured an article by journalist and writer Yasmin el-Rashdi referencing the disappearance of Coptic girls. And in October 2011, the European Parliament issued a statement condemning violence against the Copts in Egypt and expressed particular concern about girls who have been kidnapped and forced to convert. So we're seeing a little bit of—a little bit of positive response.

So why doesn't the issue have more traction? Mr. Aderholt asked a very important question. I'd like to talk about this just a little bit before I get into the finding of the reports. I've been, as you say, in the anti-trafficking world for a long time and there are many parallels. We know enough now from years of studying recruitment strategies of human traffickers that one main way of luring young women into an exploitative relationship is under the guise of a romantic partnership. We also know that if a marriage is forced, it sets up a controlling and coercive environment which can be nothing short of exploitative.

Claims that all disappearances are the result of impulsive behavior reflect a deep and potentially dangerous misunderstanding of the use of force, fraud and coercion that are characteristics of the relationships between the young Coptic girls and their captors. Both my coauthor Nadia Ghaly and I recognize that not all disappearances are the results of abduction. Not all marriages are forced. But, and notwithstanding the ambiguity of many situations we encountered, we claim that it's not possible to dismiss each case in our 2009 report on the grounds that girls willingly left their families. We will contend the same thing for the report that we present to you today. These are not all cases of romance gone bad.

So concerned with the escalating violence against Copts in Egypt and dissatisfied with the lack of response from the U.S. government, Christian Solidarity International commissioned a second report which we are launching here today.

This new report substantiates our earlier findings. In addition, we have observed changes in trends and patterns which reinforce the premeditation of captors. The goal of this report is straightforward—to continue to support the claims of disappearances, abductions, forced conversions and forced marriages of Coptic women in Egypt and to continue to challenge the use of the term “allegation” in U.S. government reports.

So how did we get our information? Well, the findings are based on several key factors. First of all, we interviewed four Egyptian lawyers who provided us access to claims filed on behalf of Coptic women who had disappeared as well as young women who had returned from a forced marriage and conversion and were attempting to regain their Christian identities. As we've already heard, the withholding of one's original religion is a repetitive pattern.

We also interviewed representatives of civil society organizations. We spoke with family members of young women who have disappeared. Some of these individuals were represented by attorneys. Many cannot afford an attorney and therefore come themselves. We reviewed Internet sites reporting disappearances of Coptic girls but we considered only those cases with appropriate documentation, especially police reports. And we interviewed women who have returned from forced marriage and conversion.

All of our interviews were conducted from November 16th through November 25th, 2011, in and around Cairo, Egypt. Only verifiable cases are included in our report. Each of these cases is verifiable through attorneys' files, personal interviews and police reports. The names of young women and their family members and other identifying details are not published to protect their identities.

So what did we find that was a little bit different? We went in not quite knowing. We wanted to see if the political climate had changed anything. We wanted to see if the two years since our previous report had affected the situation in any way. We noticed some similarities and some marked differences.

The first key finding is that the number of disappearances and abductions appear to be increasing. Each of the attorneys that we interviewed for this report indicated an increase in his caseload since January 2011. Four attorneys collectively reported a total of over 550 cases of abductions, disappearances and petitions to re-

store Christian identity following abductions, forced marriages and forced conversions over a five-year period. Furthermore, one attorney interviewed for this report indicates firsthand knowledge of over 1,600 cases of Christians petitioning to have their conversions to Islam overturned in recent years. Sixty percent—over 900 women—900 of these cases are women.

Data collection, as in the trafficking world, remains a challenge. There is no systematic data repository within the Coptic community documenting the disappearances of young women. Priests or bishops keep records of activities within their churches and communities sometimes. Attorneys maintain their own caseloads. Activists maintain different websites but there is no cross-referencing with other data sources.

Furthermore, families of victims don't report all cases. The police do not register all complaints filed by family members. In many cases, family members of missing young women reported that police would not file a report until a lawyer intervened. In other cases, families don't file reports because they don't believe the claims will be taken seriously or because they fear retribution by the authorities. Not all families are financially able to secure the services of an attorney, and while not a guarantee of result, at least the presence of an attorney enables the filing of a legitimate claim. We personally spoke to family members who would go to up to five or six different police stations before some police officer would finally agree to file a claim. These were dismissed for all of the reasons that we've mentioned above.

We're also noting that fewer girls appear to be returning to their families. Our 2009 report focused on young women who had returned from forced marriages and conversion and were struggling to regain her Christian identities. They report instances of abuse and forced domestic servitude. One woman reported being prostituted by her captor. Since then, there has been a discernible change in the dynamics of the disappearances of young Coptic women. Attorneys handling such cases report that fewer women are being returned to their families. There is speculation that the young women might be trafficked overseas but attorneys and activists have not yet been able to document this finding and we recommend that this trend be followed more seriously.

We note that increasingly social media is being used to inform families about their daughters' conversion. One mother we spoke to told us that after looking for over six months to find news of her daughter, she happened to stumble upon a videotape of her announcing her conversion on a website of new converts to Islam.

Another deeply disturbing finding is that minors and mothers of young children are being targeted—are being increasingly targeted. In addition to disappearances of single young women over the age of 18, lawyers report an increase in the abductions of mothers with young children. While the age of consent to convert to a different religion is 18 in Egypt, there are increasing reports that children of mothers who are forced to convert are also subsequently registered as Muslim. Even if a mother returns to her community, the children are considered by law to be Muslim and will remain Muslim. So in forcibly converting one young woman, all of her children will be automatically considered Muslim as well.

The disappearances are organized and planned. We've seen this before but we've received more corroborating evidence. Attorneys, social workers and members of the clergy interviewed for this and the previous report all attest to organized and systematic planning in the cases of missing Coptic women. Tactics to lure young women into relationships follow similar patterns. One lawyer interviewed for this report stated that the same man's name occurred in multiple police reports. He married five Christian women who subsequently were forced to convert to Islam. So he would marry one, take her away, go back, work on another, get her converted, go back, work on another and systematically pursue a number of forced conversions. Family members report that their daughters or sisters were befriended by a schoolmate, a neighbor or another mother—an older mother figure over time.

Lawyers indicate that their clients benefitted materially. Frequently, family members were provided with new apartments or furniture, and unemployable young men were given jobs among the abductor families.

Abductors target vulnerable women and girls, and girls in vulnerable and unprotected moments. The concluding observations of the U.N.'s Commission on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women for Egypt expressed concern at the very limited information and statistics provided about vulnerable groups of women in Egypt. Certainly, Coptic women and girls are vulnerable in many ways. They are members of a religious minority. They come from closed, insular communities. Their minority status is the basis for legal and social discrimination.

Captors sever contact between victims and their families. The first task of the captor is to come between a young woman and members of her family. They can do this by force, by taking away her phone, by denying her any contact with her relatives. They lock her up. They deny her mobility. They threaten her, telling her that if she runs away, her family will never accept her, that they will punish her, that they will put her in a monastery.

Eventually a young woman is brainwashed and believes that she will be safe only with her Muslim captor. Ultimately, she will be truly safe only if she converts to Islam. There is no obligation for a Christian woman who marries a Muslim man to convert to Islam. So many attorneys claim that this conversion is the ultimate goal of captivity.

Captors make use of measures involving force, fraud and coercion. A young woman consents to a glass of sugarcane juice and the attention of a man whose words promise a life of love, ease and provision. Another woman shares a drink of water with a woman—with another mother who is also waiting for children after school. A third seeks friendship and escape from a harsh and sometimes abusive home environment.

Victims who have not literally been abducted nevertheless did not consent to being ripped from their family without ever seeing them again. They did not consent to being forcibly converted to a religion other than their own. They do not consent to a life of captivity within one small apartment, every outing supervised by a member of her new husband's family. They said yes to the things that young women say yes to. They say yes to friendship, to ro-

mance, to hope, a future, safety and security. It is reasonable to accept that most young women would respond in precisely the same way as many Coptic girls responded to these offers of friendship and romance which proved to be highly destructive of their own lives.

Now, about our recommendations, in developing these recommendations for this report, we consulted with attorneys and civil society actors in Egypt in order to assess what government actions might support their efforts to protect Coptic women from falling into captivity and, as a result, into forced marriages and conversions. There was considerable consensus among those that we spoke to.

First, they would request that local police stations will take seriously and file all reports on all claims of disappearance of Coptic women and girls and that all claims will be investigated and family members kept apprised of the progress of each of these cases.

The Egyptian national government will request an annual accounting of all cases of disappearances including open and ongoing cases as well as any prosecutions that resulted from these local investigations.

The Egyptian government will create a registry to document the disappearance of minors. Children of parents who convert will retain the religion of their birth until they are 18 years old. Laws which penalize discrimination based on religion in the areas of education, employment and the media will be enacted.

To the Coptic Church, the activists would like to suggest that the church maintain a central registry documenting instances of disappearance, abductions and forced marriages and conversions that is laid out according to a rigorous methodology which can document the instances without sensationalism.

The Coptic community will educate families and young women on the recruitment and deception patterns that lead to captivity. And for the international community, the recommendations are that a legal defense fund will be created to enable Coptic families to secure the presence of an attorney, which as we indicated is frequently the only way to get a case legally registered as a disappearance. International or national agencies assessing the situation of Coptic women in Egypt will recognize that coercion and fraud are represented in most cases of disappearance, forced marriages and forced conversion, all of which obviate the consent of the victim.

And finally, my last—the recommendation that ended my last testimony to you, Mr. Chairman, that international organizations and our government will recognize both the scope and the scale of the problem and no longer refer to such cases as allegations. I don't think that anyone will refer to the witness who we'll hear later as an allegation.

Mr. Chairman, and members of the Commission, I thank you for your time and interest in this very important matter. I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. SMITH. Ms. Clark, thank you so very much for your incisive testimony, for undertaking this extraordinary human rights project, to report, to investigate and for doing it yourself. So thank

you so much for the bravery that that surely exhibits. Dr. Phares, please proceed.

**DR. WALID PHARES, CO-SECRETARY GENERAL, THE TRANS-ATLANTIC LEGISLATIVE GROUP ON COUNTERTERRORISM**

Dr. PHARES. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, members of the Commission, I would like to thank you very much for extending this invitation to me to address this very dramatic issue of persecution and of abduction of girls and women in the Coptic community in Egypt. I have titled my paper, my presentation as “The Strategy of Subduing a Community by Terrorizing its Women.” And thank you, Mr. Chairman, for including the full text of my testimony in the records. What I would like to do for the sake of time is to summarize the following.

First, from a strategic perspective, what are the findings of our colleagues. This year and last year in this body, in Congress and also in the European Parliament, if I may, have been telling us what are the major points that we can respond to. From there, I’d like to ask five questions and answer them. That would allow the Commission and therefore members of Congress and our government in general terms to respond to the challenge.

The violence against Coptic women in Egypt, as many experts have already testified before this prestigious forum over the past few years, and last year in particular, these acts of violence against Egyptian Coptic women both individually and collectively have been unrelenting, repetitive and directed almost exclusively at young, single women and who are at the age of marriage or just about.

This violence, which is described in several reports already submitted to your Commission, to the Congress in general, to other legislative bodies around the world, have—can be summarized as follows.

A, the attacks have been ongoing for more than three decades, with peaks in some years.

B, the victims have primarily been young Christian women.

C, Egyptian security and judicial authorities have not helped in general terms the families of these girls and have not actually conducted an investigation, a thorough national investigation of who is that network in Egypt that basically has been perpetrating those attacks for the last five years at least documented.

D, an overwhelming majority of the kidnappings and violence have been carried out by individuals and groups who claim to be acting on their ideology, on behalf of their ideology, a doctrine, a set of fundamental beliefs known as Salafism or Jihadism which they claim is the strict implementation of sharia laws.

E, an overwhelming majority of these crimes have been dismissed by government security and justice institutions, and the radical factions have been protecting many of these perpetrators, assigning essentially blame to the female victims and their families.

F, violence against young Christian women in Egypt has continued after the downfall of the previous regime, and formation of the current alternative government and its institutions.

These findings, Mr. Chairman, prompt the following questions, five of them.

One, have the attacks been widespread and consistent over time, so that we can deal with the argument of this is just a reaction to a love affair or a social situation gone bad? Is the history of these attacks reflective of the legal and security status of the Coptic Christian community at large?

Two, is the violence committed by an organized movement or by individuals who claim to be acting on behalf of an ideological movement?

Three, does the attitude of government security, judicial and political institutions reflect cooperation with the attackers, or just neglect for the protection of a segment of Egyptian society?

Four, what are the consequences of the continuous attacks against Coptic females, and thus the Coptic community, despite the regime change of government change and rise of new institutions in Egypt, which I feel is a key element in our discussion today.

And five, what can and should the United States government, specifically the administration, do to put an end to these violent practices against the women of the Christian Coptic community?

Answering those questions or attempting to do so will equip members of the Commission and thus of Congress with the perspective needed to understand the exact nature of the crisis and make informed recommendations regarding possible new legislation and alternative policies for adoption by the executive branch.

Point number one, the nature of these attacks—according to prior research submitted to your Commission and to other congressional committees, targeted attacks against Coptic Christian women are not unrelated and isolated acts of violence.

On the contrary, kidnapping and forcing captive women to convert to Islam has been documented for decades, revealing hundreds of victims each year. Research and Coptic sources claim that violence against Coptic women has been practiced since even before the rise of modern Egypt. But current research is confirming that this abuse was documented for at least the last half a decade, or decade, especially in the last five or three years. Therefore, the first characteristic of the crisis is its longstanding history.

This means that any solution to the problem must address its historical roots and scope of the violence. This violence against Coptic females took place before and after the Arab Spring, before and after 9/11, before and after the end of the Cold War and before and after World War II. We are dealing with a threat that has the dimension of an attitude by either a movement or an ideology with regard to the Coptic community.

Now, with regard to the perpetrators, while research over the past five years, I must admit, has not revealed a well-designed structure that openly and officially takes responsibility for these attacks against Coptic Christian women, it has shown, however, patterns and statements that indicate the existence of a movement that hails from a well-publicized ideology, namely, Salafist, namely Islamist fundamentalists, or also known as Jihadism.

In almost all cases, Mr. Chairman, the kidnapers argued that their actions were legitimized and inspired by Salafist and jihadist principles. One central tenet that most of my colleagues have men-



tioned already this year and last year, one central tenet of those principles is that individuals—in this case, females—who convert from Christianity to Islam cannot revert back to their original religion, must accept their, quote, unquote, “forced marriages,” and in some cases, families of the victims were asked to pay a tribute to recover their daughters.

The reference to jihadist views, applicable to Christian Copts in general and women and girls in particular, shows that the acts perpetrated against them and their communities are ideologically and politically motivated.

Government failure and collaboration—we also detected that based on reports by human rights groups as well as the Coptic community and liberal Egyptian NGOs, that local Egyptian police and security forces, national security agencies, including the now-gone state security agency Amn al-Dawla, are or were either covering up the attacks, or protecting the perpetrators.

Therefore, when we look at the historical timeline of security collaboration with the perpetrators or, at a minimum, non-support of the victims and their families, this coincides as well with the timeline of similar aggressive behavior against the community as a whole. Coptic activists and NGOs—including the Washington, D.C.-based Coptic Solidarity International—have accused Egyptian security services under the Mubarak regime of using Salafists to conduct attacks against Coptic targets to maintain the community under the protection of the government.

Coptic and liberal Egyptian NGOs have argued that the new security agencies formed after the collapse of the Mubarak regime, after the latest legislative elections, continue to allow these practices or help the perpetrators.

Consequences of attacks against Coptic women, which I consider one of the most important key analyses in our discussion—if the aggression targeting Christian Coptic women continues and widens, without a determined and aggressive intervention by the Egyptian government to put an end to this practice, there will be serious consequences on Egyptian Christian women, their own communities—Christian Coptic community—but also on Egyptian women in general, leading to a weakening of civil society and a dramatic setback to freedom, to human rights and democracy in Egypt.

The chief consequence of unchecked aggressions against Coptic women and the terror—is basically the terror it is instilling in the hearts of Christian women who count for at least half of the 15 or so million Christian Copts in Egypt. The hundreds of repetitive attacks against Coptic women send a clear signal to millions of young women in Egypt who feel targeted by the jihadists and Salafists, compelling them to limit their movement, to narrow their social circles and to separate them from Muslim communities.

So violence against Coptic women leads to a de facto gender apartheid in Egypt, where Christian women will be increasingly deterred from finding jobs, from expressing their opinion, from wearing their own preferred outfits and circulating in public spaces.

The effects on Coptic women will also extend to the entire Christian community as half of its members are increasingly intimidated

by acts of violence committed on hundreds of young women. When one segment of community is terrorized, it reverberates throughout their families and communities, forcing the collective into mental ghettos and therefore emigration.

Rape, abduction and forced conversion are among the root causes of a general sentiment among Copts that pushes thousands of them to flee the country—the country of their ancestors. Outside the community, the attacks against Coptic Christian women and their results will bring other consequences, Mr. Chairman, to bear on secular Egyptian women in general, meaning Muslim secular Egyptian women in general, both liberal and conservative.

By failing to protect its Coptic citizens, the Egyptian government will be perceived as incapable of protecting other segments of the population also targeted by the Salafists and the jihadists.

Muslim liberal and secular women, who already fear the strict implementation and enforcement of the jihadi-viewed sharia law, will be under increased pressures by the most extreme elements of the Islamist movement to wear the hijab and later, the full niqab. The attacks on defenseless Coptic women are a mere prelude to a wider campaign to impose its ideological agenda, clearly seen in the Salafist movement as early as 2011.

The role of the U.S. government, finally—the United States government has an international responsibility in addressing the situation in the same way our U.S. foreign policy has addressed mass scale abuse of human rights around the globe for the last 20 to 30 years. We recommend for the Helsinki Commission to adopt the following steps as a way to help protect Coptic women and girls in Egypt from abuse, and defend their universal rights.

One, reaffirm the conditions on global U.S. foreign aid to Egypt, despite all the debate that has been taking place in Washington about it, of a constitutional provision announced by the drafters of the new Egyptian constitution, that the practices of abducting, torturing and forcing conversions on Coptic women or any element of society is a terrorist act which is punishable by law. This is not an infringement of their liberties. It is a terrorist act. Kidnapping in Colombia is a terrorist act. Kidnapping in any part of the world is a terrorist act.

Two, make a congressional declaration that crimes against Coptic women inspired by extremist ideologies targeting communities will be considered crimes against humanity punishable under international law. There are no differences between rape and aggression against women in Egypt and what happened in Yugoslavia or in Bosnia or in Kosovo.

Three, partner with Coptic and civil society NGOs, extending financial support directly to these entities as part of the global U.S. aid to Egypt. If you want to send foreign aid to Egypt, if you want to send hundreds of millions of dollars, we also need to earmark part of that aid to the NGOs that are representative of the weakest elements of the Egyptian society, that will be women and minorities.

Four, ensure that the educational and informational system in Egypt, particularly state-supported institutions, which we are funding, by the way, isn't used to propagate the ideology or precepts used by the perpetrators of the attacks as a way to legitimize vio-

lence and discrimination against Coptic women and encourage acts of violence against them.

Mr. Chairman, what happened in the classroom in Egypt is the beginning of the process of the development of a radical educational and also cultural policy that ends up convincing the perpetrators that what they are doing is the right thing to do. So we need to also be sure that educational and informational systems in Egypt are reformed—are adapted to international standards of human rights.

And lastly, number five is to conduct an international investigation. It would be U.S.-led, and I'm sure that the European government would be very interested in joining. But an international investigation of this mass abuse of human rights that is targeting a segment of an Egyptian society, because we cannot rely on the Egyptian justice system at this point in time. We could help that justice system. We could equip them with advisers. We could begin by sending a commission to Egypt to begin that investigation.

I would end by saying that the current situation in Egypt presents us with a historic opportunity. Now that elections have taken place, now that a president has been elected, it is very important to our administration, to our executive power to engage in a discussion—in an open discussion, not in a discreet discussion.

The perpetrators in Egypt must know from the media, from public discussion that our officials are demanding from the president of Egypt, are demanding from the future elected or the current parliament that these issues would be at the table, that the constitutional committee that is looking at the future constitution will take consideration of these elements. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, members.

Mr. SMITH. Dr. Phares, thank you very much for your extensive testimony and your leadership for so long on these issues. I'd like to now ask a woman who has been victimized by abduction—as I indicated earlier, recently got asylum here in the United States. And as we all know, getting asylum is no easy business. There needs to be proof. An administrative law judge needs to be convinced. There is a whole process that needs to be followed. Her information seems to be absolutely credible. So we welcome her to the Commission and ask her if she would now proceed.

**“ANNE,” A COPTIC CHRISTIAN FROM EGYPT AND ATTEMPTED  
KIDNAP VICTIM**

Ms. ANNE. [Via interpreter.] I am a Coptic Christian from Egypt, from Alexandria, and on January 5th, 2011, I was at my mother's and it was about 7 p.m. at night. I had left my mother's home and I was carrying my daughter because she was asleep.

I was getting onto a microbus and when I had taken the first step, I felt myself falling backwards onto my back. I didn't know what was going on. All I felt was that someone was picking me up off the ground. I was asking him, what do you want, what are you doing. And he said, you're coming with me. You're going to get into this taxi. I didn't know what to do. I was just trying to hold on to my daughter because I was afraid she would fall. I was screaming. I didn't know what he wanted. I had no idea why he was doing this.

People started to look and wondering what was happening and he just started yelling, this is no one's concern, she's an enemy of Islam, this is no one's concern, she's an enemy of Islam. I didn't know what to do. He was dragging me and people were just watching. And then he got me to the taxi. He kept trying to shove me into the taxi by holding me from the back of my head. I kept trying to resist and push back but he just kept trying to shove me into the taxi by holding me from the back of the neck.

As he was trying to shove me into the car, my daughter's eye hit the corner of the door of the taxi. I didn't know what to do. She was screaming. I didn't know how to fight back. I wasn't sure what I should do. Suddenly, the guard from my mother's building started hitting him and he pulled me away from him. The guy jumped into the taxi. There was a driver in there and they drove away. The man who helped me was only concerned about helping me and taking care of me.

He took me back to the home. I was crying. I couldn't process what had just happened. I couldn't understand why did this happen, what just happened to me. My daughter was crying. I looked and I noticed that her eye was red and it started to swell. The man who saved me hit the intercom button and called my parents down. My parents came down and saw me in a hysterical state. He called my husband and told him to come immediately. He came and he took us both to the hospital. When we got to the emergency room, they told us not to worry. It was just a superficial injury and they gave us some medication to treat the injury and then we started home.

On the way home, I started to feel terrible pain. I was in my second month of pregnancy and I started to feel like I was bleeding. My mother contacted the doctor and he told her to have me come to the clinic immediately. My mother took my daughter home and my father, my husband and I went directly to the clinic. The doctor there informed me that I had miscarried and I had to perform a procedure to remove the baby.

They performed the procedure for me and after that I returned home with my father and my husband. I was in a very bad emotional state as was my daughter. I was terrified. I was terrified from everything. I was afraid to leave the house. I was even afraid to hear the doorbell ring. I kept asking myself what if this man hadn't saved me, where would I be now, what would have happened to my daughter.

Until today, when I think about it, I thank God that I was saved. But then I wonder about the others that weren't saved, what happened to them. I try and imagine what about those people, what about the others, the other victims. I'm here today so I can tell you what happened to me. I try and imagine and think what would—where would I be, where would my daughter be, would I ever have seen my husband again, my family again.

We live in Egypt and we experience a lot of persecution. But we try and live with it. But the deaths and the kidnappings, that is too difficult to bear. For a child to live without a mother or a mother to live without her child, what did they do, what did they do to deserve this. What would have happened to my father? What would have happened to my husband? They take women because they

know the shame that it will bring to the family. How can they survive? Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much for bravely coming here and telling us of what is an absolutely gut-wrenching and terrible experience. And I think you help to bring for all of us what it was like to be in the beginning stages of an abduction. We know others who have been abducted for long periods of time. Michele Clark has spoken often about that, especially in previous testimonies. So thank you so much for your courageous witness before this Commission today.

I would like to ask a few questions of our witnesses, beginning first with Dr. Phares. The name of your testimony, the headline, the title of "The Strategy of Subduing a Community by Terrorizing its Women,"—we just heard a terrorized woman talk about how being a victim has the potential of bringing shame to herself and to the family which I think is precisely and the absolutely wrong way of looking at it.

But be that as it may, I would argue, and I know you would agree, that this kind of terrible targeting of women, terrorizing women brings shame not only to those who engage in this barbaric behavior but also those who enable it by indifference, by their silence, by their looking askance, looking the other way.

And I want to ask you—and I mean this very sincerely and I hope if you have information, we will write—I will write a letter asking if this was brought up. Before I get to that, after our first hearing, when Michele Clark testified and told us it is no longer a case of saying these are allegations but these are facts on the ground that women are being abducted, they are being forced into marriages, they are being abused. This is a despicable treatment of women. And it's not just an allegation. It needs to be really combated. And it needs more chronicling.

Certainly the United States government has the capabilities, the wherewithal and the knowledge as to how to do it. In direct response to that testimony, Congressman Frank Wolf put your statements, Ms. Clark, in the hands of Anne Patterson, who was actually meeting with him right upstairs in this office—his office. And I put it in the hands of Michael Posner, the assistant secretary for democracy, human rights and labor.

I would ask you, if you could, do you have any knowledge as to whether or not Assistant Secretary Michael Posner has done anything with this damaging information? I would point out for the record so there's absolute clarity on this, when we had a phone videoconference with Anne Patterson, I asked her directly with others sitting there listening as to whether or not she had acted upon this terrible human right abuse being meted out on women in Egypt and whether or not, you know, we had deployed Foreign Service officers, the human rights person in the embassy to follow-up and to look into this and do their own report.

You have gone to Egypt, Ms. Clark. You took time out of your schedule to do this. We have people on the ground who are eminently capable and knowledgeable and know how to do this kind of reporting. And Ms. Patterson told me—Ambassador Patterson—no, she had not gotten around to it. And we had a very spirited ex-

change. I asked her to do it. To date, I know of no investigation undertaken by the U.S. embassy in Cairo.

Added to that, we just had our Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton meet with the president of Egypt, and I'm wondering if any of you could tell us or if we have any reason to believe that the Secretary of State has raised this issue anywhere and at any time and specifically has she raised it with the SCAF and/or—not and/or, but and has she raised it with the president of Egypt. Do you have any information?

Ms. CLARK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I read the transcript of the hearing in which you spoke to Secretary Posner. I was not able to be at that hearing on November 16th of last year because I was actually getting on a plane going to Egypt that very afternoon. So I remember the date. What I can say is that no one from his office has contacted me to find out or the coauthor of this report, to find out information about our cases.

The cases have been disputed. The cases—people have gone publicly on record saying that no one has been able to substantiate these cases, that they are inflammatory—they contain inflammatory allegations but without substantiation. The only way they could be substantiated is by asking me who's involved because the identities have not been published and no one has approached me from Secretary Posner's office to ask me about follow-up on the report.

Dr. PHARES. Mr. Chairman, I would like first of all to take the opportunity to thank you for what you do for the community and for engaging the community not just in inviting witnesses to testify in front of this prestigious committee but actually for yourself, for the second or third year to go to the community, to their leadership and engaging them, sitting with them for hours and hours.

And yourself acting as an investigator of the human rights abuses of the community, that is the example that we in the world of NGOs would like to see you and your colleagues and also the State Department and the administration engaging in.

And the term engagement has been used by the administration for the last four years repetitively. But unfortunately, among the recipients of the engage, we didn't see a representative of the Copts. We saw many delegations from the Muslim Brotherhood, before and after the Arab Spring. We are now seeing possibly Salafist delegations heading to the State Department or to the embassy or maybe beyond that.

But we haven't seen delegations from the Coptic leadership going or being invited actually to our administration and being asked about that issue. My esteemed colleague mentioned the issue of alleged. I mean, in international law, if one incident is alleged, if 20 incidents are alleged, if 500 incidents over five years are alleged, then what is alleged at the end of the day?

To answer you more specifically your question about do we know about any discussions that took place between the secretary and the president of Egypt, well, what we have are open resources and open sources and also the responses from the NGO—the Coptic NGO. The issue of the Coptic community as such—and I would like to mention—take advantage also of my time to mention the direc-

tion of the narrative of the administration, which is very important. And that could help the narrative of Congress.

When we talk about religious freedom, we put all our efforts to make sure that religious freedom basically is the freedom of the religious community. It's not just to go to church on Sunday. It is not that hour and a half or three hours from home to church and back. Unfortunately, the narrative that we've heard over the past three years, and significantly this year, is that religious freedom is now being perceived by the executive branch as freedom to practice faith individually.

That is not religious freedom because you may well go to church while the entire community is suppressed or driven to jails or even outside the country. What needs to be done is a re-discussion, first in Congress and then in dialogue with the administration, that the Coptic community has to be recognized as a community.

These are not just individual Egyptians who happen to be Christian who are struggling to go, you know, every Sunday and pray at church, which means that this community basically has to be received, has to be basically recognized in the same way we see representatives from the Kurds of Iraq or from the people from Darfur or from the Palestinians, for that matter, or even from East Timor. This is a community that has rights. It happened that it is Christian.

In Bosnia, they were Muslims. In other places, they are parts of different religion. So unless we see a change in the narrative of the administration that would recognize the Copts as a community, that would start to receive them at the highest level of our government as such and listen to their issues, I don't think that there is a recognition of the problem that exists as a collective problem in Egypt unfortunately.

Ms. CLARK. Thank you, and I'd like to really support what my colleague has said. In the early days of the anti-trafficking community, as you know so well, the State Department required a minimum number of cases. A country would be put on the TIP report only if a minimum number of cases were proven. That makes sense. You don't want to issue a scathing report based on allegations. These were provided. Countries were rated. I know this because I was involved in designing several of the methodologies used to count these numbers. What are we waiting for in this particular area? How many more young women will it take who come and say they endured a miscarriage because they were wrenched into a bus with their baby whose eye is wounded next to a car holding onto the mother.

The instances of Copts seeking asylum since the collapse of the Mubarak regime has escalated, including a large number of women on these same claims. So we're seeing one aspect of our government that is recognizing the truth of these instances. Our immigration courts are saying yes, that you were almost abducted, that you returned from an abducted situation, that you fear abduction. These are reasons for granting asylum.

I think it's time to create a bit of harmony in our policy in this area. I was a witness myself in a federal immigration hearing a year ago for asylum on the basis of fear of abduction and that in that case it was also awarded. So enough is enough, really. How

many more times do we have to sit here and bring voices and bring stories and talk about parents who agonize? They have imagined—as a parent, your daughter doesn't come home from work, you don't see her for two months, three months, nine months. You hear nothing and maybe if you're lucky you'll then hear her—you'll see her face covered in a veil announcing her conversion in muffled terms on a YouTube video. But worse, maybe you'll hear nothing, absolutely nothing.

The silence now, the abductions, the disappearance followed by nothing is so disturbing because something is happening to those young women. They haven't been raptured. They haven't disappeared into thin air. Something has happened to them. What? We need to find out. We need to require an accounting. We need to find out how many there are and we need to start investigating what is happening to these disappeared women.

Mr. SMITH. I should make a note for the record at this point we had invited Assistant Secretary Jeffrey Feltman from the administration to come here to take questions and to give testimony, of course. But apparently, they chose not to come.

I would say for the record as well, we will reissue the request and that would include Assistant Secretary Michael Posner to come and give an accounting. It's not like—and especially the women who are being victimized—are being impatient. This information was physically—I actually put it into his hands. It wasn't sent by courier or anything else and we still have had no response, which I find appalling. If not the United States, then who?

Thankfully the European Parliament has shown even more interest than the United States government has and I think that's unfortunate. We should have both be equally interested when women are being exploited and abused in such a horrific way. You noted, Ms. Clark, in your statement that the number of disappearances and abductions appear to be increasing.

And just four attorneys, as you pointed out, collectively a total of 550 cases of abductions, disappearances and petitions to restore Christian identify following abductions, forced marriages and forced conversions over a five-year period—four lawyers and I'm sure there are hundreds, if not thousands of lawyers, but certainly hundreds who would have vital knowledge of this issue. Do you have any sense yet as to the scope of this grotesque human rights abuse?

And secondly, with regards to this, where is the U.N.? You know, Egypt is a signatory since 1982 of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights. Article VIII of that makes it very clear—it forbids slavery and servitude. Forced marriage certainly falls under the rubric of that. So my question would be, you know, where—you know, there was a periodic review back in I think it was 2010. But at any time, any country can bring—and we are members in good standing of the Human Rights Council—can bring an action before the Human Rights Council to engage in debate and investigation. To the best of my knowledge, the United States has said nothing. I'm not sure if the European members who are part of that Commission have said anything. But it would seem to me that would be an avenue to raise this—again, this grotesque violation of women's rights in Egypt which is the equivalent of



rape. When you abduct someone, force them into a marriage, by any other definition that is rape. And why have we been so silent? If you can speak to that issue and those couple of questions?

Ms. CLARK. Thank you, Mr. Smith. There is an increasing—the challenges I mentioned in my testimony of data collection are manifold for two reasons. The authorities are most of the time unwilling to file a disappearance report. If a Coptic father or relative goes to a police station in the district where just after a daughter disappeared or was abducted, many, many times that parent gets—or family members gets a runaround—well, they're here or well, we don't know, maybe she's just run away again, why are you reporting her, she probably went off with her boyfriend. And so, often the only way a Coptic family can file a case of disappearance of abduction is if they have a lawyer. Many—because many of the disappearance and abductions take place in rural communities or communities where individuals have less disposable income, they can't afford a lawyer. And many of the attorneys that we spoke to actually take these cases completely pro bono and it ends up becoming a major part of their caseload. So they work—they're very heroic in that they put in a great deal of long hours to take these cases.

So, which is why one of our recommendations was to try to enable some kind of legal defense fund among the civil society actors to make sure that the lawyers are compensated and continue to go on making their living. So scope, I'm really—it's very hard-pressed. Five lawyers are saying that they are seeing over a hundred cases a year and these are four lawyers, it can go anywhere. I know some people are partial to extrapolation. I tend to be wary of extrapolation. It's a lot. It's a lot.

Perhaps Dr. Phares has more understanding—understands more. And the U.N., no—we were able to—in researching this second report, we looked high and low for evidence that the U.N.—the Commission on the Elimination of Discrimination Against—All Forms of Discrimination Against Women—whether they were doing anything. No, we have not been able to find any references among the U.N. or agencies directed towards the Coptic issue.

Mr. SMITH. So the panel of experts that seeks to implement and admonish countries—that's CEDAW—only makes that vague comment that you put into the report?

Ms. CLARK. Yes, that's was as much—

Mr. SMITH. And they have done nothing more than that?

Ms. CLARK. Nothing more than that that we have been able to find.

Mr. SMITH. Let me ask you, your trend lines were important and again, number of appearance—disappearances and abductions increasing, fewer girls appear to be returning. And you know, with every statement you've made, disappearances are organized and planned. The trend line is bad and getting worse. What do you think it will take for the United States government and for other governments and hopefully Islamic countries and especially the country of Egypt, the government of Egypt to understand the outrage and the shame and dishonor this terrible human rights abuse brings to Egypt? How do you shout out loud enough to say these women are being abducted? What if it was your daughter or your sister or your mother?

Ms. CLARK. The calls for justice need to come and they need to come louder. It needs to be brought up by our embassy in Egypt. There has to be an accounting.

Mr. SMITH. Have they? Have they brought this up?

Ms. CLARK. To my knowledge, I think you and I are on the same page as far as what we know. Dr. Phares, would you—

Dr. PHARES. Yes, Mr. Chairman, thank you for asking this question. I would insist again on the fact that the administration or any administration should change direction in dealing with the Coptic issue. This is not about individual problems with other individual, you know, perpetrators. This is an issue of community.

Before the Arab Spring in Egypt, the Egyptian government of Hosni Mubarak, our ally, despite repetitive demands by the Congress to look into the issue, their representative in the Human Rights Council in Switzerland has blocked—has been blocking the issues. Now, we need to come to President Morsi, the democratically elected president of Egypt and ask him to instruct his own representative, his own ambassador in Geneva at the council to actually raise the issue.

We want the Egyptian government themselves to raise the issue so that we would basically come and help them. But more important, as my colleague has mentioned, there should be actual physical legal acts on our behalf and on behalf of the international community. We can certainly write to the Arab League. You, Mr. Chairman, mentioned the issue of shaming them.

Well, they are members of the Arab League and when the Arab League took a decision to have an intervention—a collective intervention in Libya because of abuse of human rights, Egypt voted for. So now, yes, we'd like to send a letter, Congress could, the administration should, to the Arab League to look into the issue. And you could go higher than that, as you just mentioned, to the Organization of the Islamic Conference. These are institutions with whom we have relationship.

The administration has an ambassador basically that goes to the Organization of the Islamic Conference. We should enable that ambassador to go and talk about the specific issue. Egypt is a member of the OIC. So we need to engage in a dialogue with the administration to convince them to use every tool at their powers. It's not just a discrete discussion between a secretary of state and a president. It should be an open issue.

And last, if I may say, if it comes to that level, our embassy should simply, you know, grant visas to the victims and bring them to Congress or your European counterparts should bring them to the European Parliament. Make it into a public debate, a public issue. That would basically put a lot of pressure on the government of Egypt.

Mr. SMITH. Michele—Ms. Clark, you mentioned in your testimony that mothers with young children are increasingly targeted for abduction. And we heard from the victim just a few moments ago when she said, what would happen to my daughter if she—if the abductor had succeeded. My question to you is, is this a new trend or are we just getting more information on that? You know, what happens to those children? Are they compelled to become Muslim as well?

Ms. CLARK. Yes, they are. If the mothers—if the mother is forcibly converted, then all children take on the dominant religion, which is Islam. When we were there on our last trip, we spoke to a number of families where the mother—the children were kept from—were not—were caught between two worlds because the families were continuing to—in cases where mothers had been able to come back, where the children—or if the mother is abducted, even if the children are not with her, the children are still converted automatically according to practice.

So the children are caught between two worlds because they are from a Christian community but their documents would indicate that they have been converted because of the conversion of one parent. And so, they become trapped.

Mr. SMITH. Let me—

Ms. CLARK. Yes, the trend is more. We encountered a greater number of families where abductions actually included a mother and several children or targeting a family, a mother was abducted on her way to Cairo to visit her mother in the hospital and then this woman's daughter was at the same time being lured in through a fraudulent relationship away from her studies at a university.

And so the whole family was targeted in different locations. It was actually very strategic, to use Dr. Phares' words. There was a plan behind this to literally co-opt the entire family.

Mr. SMITH. Let me ask you, Dr. Phares, have any—you talked to strongly about violence against women, which this is, and terrorizing women. Are there any of the women's organizations taking a stand in favor of Coptic Christian women and spoken out?

Dr. PHARES. Mr. Chairman, to my knowledge, from public narrative posted or printed, we haven't seen a significant statements or policy papers issued by prominent national organizations dealing with women's issues both in the United States or dealing with those issues abroad. There have been mention, of course, of these issues but we haven't seen, for example, major NGOs dealing with women raising the issue of persecution of Coptic women.

And if I may take advantage of the answer to mention that the third branch of our government, I have testified for the last 18 years to many courts, like you have, dealing with political asylum. Judges' first question to us, to most of the experts who are dealing with the Coptic issue and with other persecutions as well is, is there a country condition?

It's not just about the person. Are you testifying on that person or on a country condition? And they would not grant permission, they would not grant political asylum unless the expert would explain to them that of course the community is persecuted. So that's—you have with you the third branch logical question about this issue so that we could communicate this to the executive branch.

Mr. SMITH. Do imams countenance this and affirm or in any way embrace this abuse of women?

Dr. PHARES. In Egypt, regarding the position of the clergy, one must recognize that the highest authorities in al-Azhar have had several positions condemning any act of violence. The problem is that we would like to see them condemning the network that is

perpetrating these acts of violence. And we've seen this across the Middle East.

Islamist authorities have been, you know, candid enough to condemn terrorism or to condemn acts of violence against minorities should it be in Syria or in Lebanon or in Egypt and specifically in Egypt. What we need them to see—to direct themselves to is to condemn the actual networks that are conducting this and the actual ideology that the networks are using in perpetrating their acts.

Mr. SMITH. Let me just ask our victim who, again, we're so grateful she's here, all of us—I'm sure even the panel feels the same way. Before you were abducted, did you have any fears of abduction? Is abduction something that is discussed among your friends? And have any of your friends had any similar experiences?

Ms. ANNE. [Via interpreter.] Before this attempted kidnapping, many times we would be spit on in the street, cursed at, acid water sometimes thrown on women. It hasn't happened to me but it's happened to others. I was afraid. Even after the event, after the Saints Church, I was even afraid to take my daughter to preschool. We are afraid for ourselves. We are afraid for our children. In the last two years, a lot of bad things have been happening right after one another.

Mr. SMITH. Let me just ask our panelists if they have any final closing comments that they would like to make. I would note that the recommendation for or the suggestion of a letter to the OIC I think is an excellent one and to others. We will undertake that and follow up. I plan on doing a followup letter to the secretary of state asking what, how often, where has this barbaric practice and the effort to combat it been raised with the secretary of state and others.

So I do hope that's a good news story, that this has been robustly engaged and they're fighting back. And that would include with the SCAF, whether or not they are, you know, ever focused on—you know, the economic or I should say the military aid of \$1.3 billion which is a huge amount of money and so it seems to me that they need to be engaged even at least equally with the president.

I would ask you if you might want to comment whether or not an amendment requiring or linking the government's efforts to combat this egregious practice and linking it to the billion-three [dollars] that goes to Egypt will be a wise decision in the foreign ops bill. Yes, we know that the administration, as they did with the religious freedom part, could simply waive it and I hope they wouldn't. In good faith, I hope that they would not waive it or perhaps deduct a portion of the aid as a penalty. If there's no penalty and if it's not even being brought up, why do we expect any kind of positive movement? And so on the amendment issue, if you might want to touch on that, and then any concluding comments that you might want to make.

Ms. CLARK. Thank you, again. I want to thank you, Mr. Smith, for holding this hearing and Christian Solidarity International, for being so persistent and publishing not one but two reports to make sure that the information is brought to those who are decision-makers.

Women need to be able to pick up their children from school without fear of being abducted. Young girls need to be able to go out and have cups of coffee with their friends without fearing that the brother lurking in the background is perhaps going to be raping them. Young women need to be able to come and go and have lives without looking over their shoulder 24 hours a day wondering if they're going to end up forced into a taxi, thrust into al-Azhar to be forcibly converted, married to someone that has deceived them about the nature of the relationship and living in a coerced situation as a domestic servant or potentially trafficked outside of their own country.

To not address this issue is to say that we don't care. And that we cannot say. So should there be an amendment to the foreign aid bill? Absolutely, because we're talking about one of the rights that is just so fundamental to all of us here as Americans. It's at the heart of what our country is. Because of fear of abduction, they now feel that—these women feel that they have no movement. They can't come and go.

The parameters of their daily lives are increasingly entrenched around survival and safety. This is no way to live. The suffering of parents who haven't heard from their daughters for months and years and the silence continues is no way for a family to live. The sense of marginalization of the young children who are converted because their mother was forced into conversion and living in a no man's land of not being accepted by their own community, that's not a way for anybody to live.

Mr. Smith, it's time that we require acknowledgement of this issue as a bona fide violation of human rights, as a violation of religious freedom, as a cruel instance of exploitation against women, as a case of human trafficking and something that must end. Thank you.

Dr. PHARES. Mr. Chairman, I am for an amendment that would link foreign aid to Egypt to the human rights abuses and the measurement—a clear measurement of these human rights abuses and the behavior with the Christian women in Egypt should be part of this measurement. However, we could help the State Department and the executive branch by suggesting that they would organize a conference here in Washington, D.C., so that the American public, who is basically funding this foreign aid at the end of the day, can hear and see directly from the victims and from all other political parties in Egypt.

Namely, I would like to see a conference that would invite the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafists, those who in Egypt are claiming that persecution does not exist on the one hand and Coptic and women and other minorities, NGOs under the auspices of the State Department to just have C-SPAN and have the American public, realizing what is the real relationship and what are the problems.

And last, I would also like to make a recommendation for our foreign policy when we meet with President Morsi to make sure that he understands that the United States do consider those issues as part of international law, as part of our international commitment. And lately, President Morsi, in order to make us feel comfortable and the intentional community and make those communities feel comfortable said that he would be willing to appoint a vice presi-

dent who would be a Copt, another vice president who would be a woman.

Well, the response came from the Coptic community a few weeks ago, from Coptic Solidarity International Convention in Washington. They actually told President Morsi, thank you for your suggestion. We don't want anybody to be appointed. We would like to elect our representative and serve as your vice president. So let's see what his response is going to be. And thank you very much for inviting me.

Mr. SMITH. And for the final word, the woman who bravely has come here to testify about her ordeal.

Ms. ANNE. The last thing is I wish I could have filed the police report. But my father advised me, who is an attorney, that if we go, we won't get any of our rights. In all likelihood, we would be transferred to Egyptian state security.

Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. Thank you all for your tremendous witness. And the Commission will follow up. Thank you for the many recommendations. The hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

## APPENDICES

### PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, CHAIRMAN, COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Good afternoon and welcome to our hearing on the escalating violence against Coptic women and girls in Egypt following the Arab Spring, including the outrageous crimes of abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriage, which the Egyptian government is doing all too little to prevent—if indeed it is doing anything at all.

It has now been almost a year and a half since the revolution began in Egypt, and Egypt is still in the foundry fires of transition—hopefully into a free and democratic state. The Egyptians have elected a parliament, but, because the Muslim Brotherhood contested independent seats, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) dissolved it with the support of the Constitutional Court.

A president, Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, was elected and installed—but not before the SCAF, who seem to be mostly secularist, curtailed presidential power over the military and given the military legislative powers.

The Constituent Panel, which was drawn from the now dissolved parliament and has been boycotted by the Coptic Christians, has begun drafting work on Egypt's new constitution—yet it may be disbanded any day by a pending court decision.

Order seems to hang by a thread and tensions run extremely high. Though Egypt has avoided civil war, the revolution and ongoing unrest and social conflict has already left many casualties in the Coptic community. Sadly, there are groups that would use the ancient Christian Coptic community as a way to build unity around a common enemy.

The SCAF was guilty of this on October 9, 2011, when the military fired on a peaceful group of Coptic Christians at Maspero and ran them over with military vehicles, while calling through the national news service for called for “honorable citizens” to “defend the army against attack”—that is, the SCAF openly incited violence against the Coptic minority.

Twenty-seven people were killed and more than 300 injured—almost all of them were Copts. The military claim that one soldier was killed but it refuses to release his name. Almost a year later, protestors are on trial for the incident, and three soldiers have been charged with misdemeanors.

Today Michele Clark will present her new report on the disappearance, forced marriages, and forced conversions of Coptic women. The vulnerability and abduction of the Coptic Christians is not a new problem. Going back to the 1970s there are many accounts of Coptic women and girls being abducted by Muslims, forcibly converted, and forcibly married. No doubt in some cases women chose to elope, marry across religious lines, and cut off relations with their family.

But the claim of the Egyptian government that this is in fact what happened to every one of the thousands of disappeared women and girls defies massive and carefully collected evidence. The women and girls who are found often claim to have been drugged and kidnapped, or kidnapped with violence. They report human rights abuses including forced conversion, rape, forced marriage, beatings, and domestic servitude.

Alarming, since the revolution, cases of reported disappearance have increased, while recovery of the women and girls have decreased.

Those women who are found and returned to their families face many obstacles—including government refusal to assist in their return, to prosecute their kidnappers, and to change their identify cards to reflect their return to their Christian faith, which seems to sanction forced conversions. Nor are we aware of any case, before or after the revolution, in which an abductor has been prosecuted.

President Morsi, in his first speech as President, envisioned Egypt as being for Muslims and Christians. This must mean true justice for Copts. Copts must be given equal protection under the law. The Copts are not asking for special rights but rather that the Egyptian government perform its basic responsibility to protect its citizens and their rights.

Secretary Clinton was in Egypt over the weekend, and some of those demonstrating were Copts carrying signs that said, “Obama, don’t send your dollars to Jihadists.” Congress sent a similar message with the 2012 Consolidated Appropriations Act, which required the Secretary to certify that Egypt was making improvements in religious freedom before we released the \$1.3 billion in aid.

An unnamed senior State Department official reported to Reuters that, “On the basis of America’s national security interests, she (Clinton) will waive legislative

conditions related to Egypt's democratic transition, allowing for the continued flow of 'Foreign Military Financing' to Egypt...the move reflects our overarching goal: to maintain our strategic partnership with an Egypt made stronger and more stable by a successful transition to democracy."

My response to that official is simply this: in Egypt, Coptic women and girls are not now protected and free to live their lives without fear of abduction, forced conversion, and other abuses of their human rights. Our policy should be to stand with them, and to every tool in our policy kit to encourage the Egyptian government to do the same.



PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. KATRINA LANTOS SWETT, CHAIR, UNITED STATES  
COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today before the Helsinki Commission on “Escalating Violence Against Coptic Women and Girls: Will the New Egypt Be More Dangerous Than the Old?” I have been asked today to give an overview about the general status of and conditions for religious freedom in Egypt, especially for Coptic Christians. I request that my statement be entered into the record.

Since its inception nearly 15 years ago, USCIRF has been deeply engaged on Egypt and for good reason: For our entire existence, and indeed, prior to our creation, religious freedom conditions, including those of Egypt’s Coptic population, have been extremely problematic. This situation continues into the present and with the election of Mohammed Morsi, the first freely elected President of Egypt, on June 30. The Egyptian transitional government continues to engage in and tolerate systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of freedom of religious freedom. Discriminatory and repressive laws and policies remain that restrict freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief. Given these concerns, and for the second year in a row, USCIRF recommended in its 2012 Annual Report that Egypt be designated a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, under the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). I also request that USCIRF’s 2012 Annual Report chapter on Egypt be entered into the record.

From the evidence we have seen, the biggest problem faced by the Copts, who comprise about 10 to 15 per cent of Egypt’s 80 million people, continues to be one of impunity. Simply stated, for decades, Egypt’s government has fostered a climate conducive to acts of violence against Copts and members of other minority communities. It has done so in at least two ways. First, Cairo’s long history of restrictive laws and policies—from blasphemy codes to an Emergency Law to across-the-board discrimination—has drawn unwelcome attention to religious minorities, further marginalizing them and leading to violent words and deeds launched by intolerant individuals as well as by radical religious groups.

Second, the government’s continued failure to protect innocent people from these attacks and to convict those responsible has served to encourage further assaults. For years, President Mubarak’s government tolerated widespread discrimination against religious minorities and disfavored religious groups, from dissident Sunni and Shi’a Muslims to Baha’is, as well as Copts and other Christians, while allowing state-controlled media and state-funded mosques to deliver incendiary messages against them. The consequences of the climate of impunity are especially apparent in Upper Egypt.

After Mubarak’s departure, a breakdown in security and a rise in sectarian violence made 2011 one of the worst years for Copts and other minorities. Last year alone, violent sectarian attacks killed approximately 100 people, surpassing the death toll of the previous 10 years combined. As during the Mubarak regime, Copts were the primary target, and most of the perpetrators still have not been brought to justice: perpetrators have not been convicted or alleged perpetrators have been detained for short periods, but eventually released without charge. While USCIRF’s 2012 Annual Report chapter on Egypt includes a list of some of the most tragic acts of violence committed against the Coptic Orthodox community, let me note the following significant incident: Last October, Egypt’s state media falsely accused Copts of attacking the military when Muslim and Christian protestors marched toward the state television station. Following the state media’s call on civilians to counter this imaginary threat, on October 9, in downtown Cairo, armed men attacked peaceful demonstrators, killing at least 26 of them, most of them Copts, while injuring over 300 more. Responding to the violence, Egypt’s military used live ammunition and also deployed armored vehicles that deliberately crushed and killed at least 12 protestors.

In addition, reports in recent years support claims that there were cases of Muslim men forcing Coptic Christian women to convert to Islam. The State Department has asserted that such cases are often disputed and include “inflammatory allegations and categorical denials of kidnapping and rape.” For example, there were credible cases in which Coptic girls voluntarily converted to Islam to marry Muslim men, and subsequently, when the relationship failed, sought to return to Christianity. Nevertheless, during the reporting period, experts and human rights groups have found that there were also credible cases where Coptic Christian women were lured deceptively into marriages with Muslim men and forced to convert to Islam. According to these reports, if a woman returns or escapes from the marriage and wants to convert back to Christianity, she faces the same legal hurdles in changing her religious affiliation on official identity documents as discussed above.

In recent years, in response to sectarian violence, Egyptian authorities have conducted “reconciliation” sessions between Muslims and Christians as a way of easing tensions and resolving disputes. In some cases, authorities compelled victims to abandon their claims to any legal remedy. USCIRF has stated that reconciliation efforts should not be used to undermine enforcing the law and punishing perpetrators for wrongdoing. In recent years, the State Department concluded that reconciliation sessions not only “prevented the prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against Copts and precluded their recourse to the judicial system for restitution” but also “contributed to a climate of impunity that encouraged further assaults.”

For all Christian groups, government permission is required to build a new church or repair an existing one, and the approval process for church construction is time-consuming and inflexible. Former President Mubarak had the authority to approve applications for new construction of churches. Although most of these applications were submitted more than five years ago, the majority have not received a response. Even some permits that have been approved cannot, in fact, be acted upon because of interference by the state security services at both the local and national levels.

In 2005, former President Mubarak devolved authority to approve the renovation and re-construction of churches from the president to the country’s governors. Several years later, some churches continue to face delays in the issuance of permits. Even in cases where approval to build or maintain churches has been granted, many Christians complain that local security services have prevented construction or repair, in some cases for many years. In addition, local security services have been accused of being complicit in inciting violence against some churches undergoing routine maintenance or repair. In recent years, the government repeatedly has pledged, most recently in October 2011, to adopt a new law that would apply to all places of worship. In June, after consulting with religious leaders and other experts, the SCAF released publicly a draft version of the law. The draft was criticized widely by Muslims, Christians, and Egyptian human rights groups. While a subsequent version has not been made public, some reports have indicated that the revised draft law covers only churches and not other places of worship.

This is not to say there has been no progress since the end of the Mubarak regime. To be sure, we have seen some hopeful developments. Last year, the Grand Sheikh at Al-Azhar began several initiatives expressing support for freedom of religion or belief. In May of last year, the government began to reopen more than 50 churches that had been closed, in some cases for years. Last July, the Supreme Administrative Court ruled that reconverts to Christianity could obtain new national identity documents indicating their Christianity but not their former Muslim faith. And following the October violence, the transitional government took steps to reduce discrimination in Egypt’s Penal Code.

Yet despite this progress, the bottom line is this: Copts need to be protected, Copts aren’t being protected, and Copts must be protected—along with every other member of Egyptian society—from attacks on their right to order their lives and practice their beliefs in dignity and peace.

As long as Copts and other religious minorities aren’t being sufficiently protected, USCIRF will continue to spotlight the problem and recommend that the U.S. government take strong action in support of religious freedom. Our recommendations to the United States government are as follows:

- First, the United States should press Egypt to improve religious freedom conditions, by repealing discriminatory decrees against religious minorities, removing religion from official identity documents, abolishing the blasphemy codes, and passing a unified law for the construction and repair of places of worship.
- Second, the United States should urge Egypt’s government to prosecute government-funded clerics, government officials, or any other individuals who incite violence, while disciplining or dismissing government-funded clerics who preach intolerance and hatred.
- Third, the United States should increase pressure on Egypt to bring to justice those who have committed violence against fellow Egyptians on account of their religion.
- Fourth, Washington should press Cairo to include robust protections for religious freedom in a new constitution.
- Fifth, the U.S. Congress should require the Departments of State and Defense to report every 90 days on the Egyptian government’s progress pertaining to religious freedom and related rights.
- Sixth, until genuine progress occurs, USCIRF renews its call for the United States to designate Egypt a “country of particular concern” as one of the world’s most serious religious freedom abusers.

- And finally, if Egypt demonstrates a commitment to progress on freedom of religion and related rights, the United States should ensure that a portion of its military aid to Egypt is used to help Egypt's police implement a plan to enhance protection for religious minorities, their places of worship, and places where they congregate.

Today, as Egypt confronts the rigors of democratic transition, will it uphold the rights of Copts and other religious minorities? The world is watching, the Helsinki Commission is watching, and USCIRF is watching, too. Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

#### USCIRF 2012 REPORT: EGYPT

**FINDINGS:** Over the past year, the Egyptian transitional government continued to engage in and tolerate systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief. Serious problems of discrimination, intolerance, and other human rights violations against members of religious minorities, as well as disfavored Muslims, remain widespread in Egypt. Violence targeting Coptic Orthodox Christians increased significantly during the reporting period. The transitional government has failed to protect religious minorities from violent attacks at a time when minority communities have been increasingly vulnerable. This high level of violence and the failure to convict those responsible continued to foster a climate of impunity, making further violence more likely. During the reporting period, military and security forces used excessive force and live ammunition targeting Coptic Christian demonstrators and places of worship resulting in dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries. The government also continued to prosecute, convict, and impose prison terms on Egyptian citizens charged with blasphemy. Implementation of previous court rulings—related to granting official identity documents to Baha'is and changing religious affiliation on identity documents for converts to Christianity—has seen some progress but continues to lag, particularly for Baha'is. In addition, the government has not responded adequately to combat widespread and virulent anti-Semitism in the government-controlled media.

Based on these concerns, USCIRF again recommends in 2012 that Egypt be designated as a "country of particular concern," or CPC, for systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom. In 2011, USCIRF, for the first time, recommended that Egypt be designated a CPC. Before that, Egypt had been on USCIRF's Watch List since 2002.

Despite claims by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) that it dismantled the state security apparatus, partially lifted the state of emergency, and addressed some ongoing religious freedom concerns, discriminatory and repressive laws and policies that restrict freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief in Egypt remain in place. Religious freedom conditions have not improved in most areas and attacks targeting religious minorities have continued. In 2011, violent sectarian attacks, targeting primarily Coptic Orthodox Christians, have resulted in nearly 100 deaths, surpassing the death toll of the previous 10 years combined. During the transitional period, the lack of adequate security in the streets has contributed to lawlessness in parts of the country, particularly in Upper Egypt.

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS:** Egypt continues to experience a period of significant change during its transition, the success of which hinges on full respect for the rule of law and compliance with international human rights standards, including freedom of religion or belief. Pursuant to the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-74), the U.S. government should not certify the disbursement of military assistance to Egypt until the Egyptian transitional government demonstrates that it is using funds appropriated through the Foreign Military Financing Program to implement policies that protect freedom of religion and related human rights in Egypt. In addition, once the Egyptian government demonstrates its commitment to freedom of religion and related rights, the U.S. government should ensure that a portion of military assistance is used to help the Egyptian police assess security needs and develop and implement an effective plan for dedicated police protection for religious minority communities and their places of worship. The U.S. government should press the transitional, and future civilian government, to undertake reforms to improve religious freedom conditions, including repealing decrees banning religious minority faiths, removing religion from official identity documents, and passing a unified law for the construction and repair of places of worship. In addition, the United States should more actively press the Egyptian government to prosecute perpetrators of sectarian violence and to ensure that responsibility for religious affairs is not placed under the jurisdiction of the domestic security agency.

Additional recommendations for U.S. policy towards Egypt can be found at the end of this chapter.

#### RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONDITIONS

##### *Transition, Parliamentary Elections, Crackdown on Dissent, and the Emergency Law*

On February 11, 2011, President Hosni Mubarak was removed from power following 18 days of a mostly non-violent, popular uprising by the Egyptian people. Subsequently, the Egyptian Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) took control of the country. Within days, the SCAF dissolved the parliament, suspended the constitution, formed a committee to recommend constitutional amendments, and called for presidential and parliamentary elections. Over the past year, the SCAF appointed a civilian cabinet; conducted a referendum that approved amendments to Egypt's constitution; issued a 63-article constitutional declaration to govern the country through the transition; and issued laws governing the formation of political parties and the structure of parliamentary elections.

The lower house of parliament (People's Assembly) was elected through a three-stage process between November 2011 and January 2012. The Freedom and Justice Party (Muslim Brotherhood alliance) and the Al-Nour Party (Salafi alliance) won approximately 47 percent and 24 percent, respectively, of the 498 seats in the lower house; all other political parties won less than 10 percent of the seats. No women and only two Christians won seats, slightly fewer than during the Mubarak regime. The SCAF appointed another 10 members, which included five Christians and three women. Elections for 180 of the 270 seats in the upper house (Shura Council) concluded in February 2012, followed by the convening of its first session at the end of that month. The remaining 90 seats of the Shura Council will be appointed by Egypt's next president. Once the parliament begins its session, it will name a 100-person constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. Presidential elections are expected to begin in May and conclude in June.

Although the parliamentary elections, despite some irregularities, were the most free and fair in decades, the SCAF tightened its grip on opposition groups. The SCAF used deadly force against public protestors, including Coptic Christians; arrested, tried, and imprisoned democracy activists; raided pro-democracy non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and also imposed travel bans on their American and European personnel; and fostered anti-Western xenophobia through state-run media. Over the past year, human rights groups have accused the military of arresting thousands of demonstrators and subsequently holding trials lacking due process, convicting, and sentencing many to three- to five-year prison terms. Many of those convicted did not have access to legal counsel and some of the trials and convictions were carried out the same day.

The transitional government undertook efforts to dismantle the state security apparatus that has operated under the Emergency Law, in effect since 1981 and most recently renewed for another two years in May 2010. In January 2012, the SCAF announced it would be lifting the Emergency Law except in cases of "thuggery," although it did not define that term. Because Egypt has operated under a state of emergency, the government has had the option to hear cases involving terrorism or drug trafficking in state security courts rather than criminal courts. The Emergency Laws restrict many human rights, including freedom of religion or belief as well as freedom of expression, assembly, and association. In addition, the state security courts do not allow the right to appeal guilty verdicts. Egyptian and international human rights groups have been critical of the courts' procedures and limits on the rule of law and due process.

Over the years, thousands of persons have been detained without charges under the Emergency Law on suspicion of illegal terrorist or political activity. Egyptian and international human rights groups have asserted that the primary purpose of the state security courts is to punish political activism and dissent, even when that dissent is peaceful. These courts also have been used to detain and try individuals deemed by the state to have "unorthodox" or "deviant" Islamic or other religious beliefs or practices. During the past year, many "security detainees" were released from prison.

##### *Government Control of Islamic Institutions*

As it did during the Mubarak era, the government maintains control over all Muslim religious institutions, including mosques and religious endowments, which are encouraged to promote an officially-sanctioned interpretation of Islam. According to Egyptian officials, the government regulates these Muslim institutions and activities as a necessary precaution against religious extremism and terrorism. The state appoints and pays the salaries of all Sunni Muslim imams, requires all mosques to be licensed by the government, and monitors sermons. During the reporting period,

Egyptian transitional government officials were concerned that increasing numbers of mosques were operating independently of any government oversight and that some of these mosques were used to incite violence.

The government-funded Al-Azhar University is one of the preeminent Sunni Muslim centers of learning in the world. The Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Ahmed Al-Tayeb, was appointed by former president Hosni Mubarak in 2010. The Islamic Research Center (IRC) of Al-Azhar has legal authority to censor and, since 2004, to confiscate any publications dealing with the Qur'an and hadith (oral traditions). In recent years, the IRC has ruled on the suitability of non-religious books and artistic productions. Al-Azhar also has the legal right to recommend confiscations, but must obtain a court order to do so. In January 2012, before the People's Assembly convened for the first time, the SCAF passed a law mandating that the Grand Sheikh be elected by Al-Azhar's Senior Scholars Authority rather than chosen by the president of the country. Such a system of election previously was in force before 1961.

During the Mubarak regime, the Egyptian government consulted Al-Azhar on a wide range of religious issues impacting Muslims in the country. Over the years, clerics and scholars at Al-Azhar have issued discriminatory fatwas (religious edicts) and delivered controversial sermons about some non-Muslim faiths, particularly the Baha'i faith, as well as disfavored or dissenting Muslims. Non-Muslims are prohibited from attending Al-Azhar University. In January 2012, Al-Azhar Grand Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tayeb put forward a "Bill of Rights" that discussed freedom of belief and expression, among other things. (See in Positive Developments in Egypt)

#### *Blasphemy and Violations against Muslims and Dissidents*

Egyptian law forbids blasphemy through Article 98(f) of its Penal Code, which prohibits citizens from "ridiculing or insulting heavenly religions or inciting sectarian strife." This provision has been applied to detain and prosecute individuals and members of religious groups whose practices deviate from mainstream Islamic beliefs or whose activities are alleged to jeopardize "communal harmony" or to insult the three "heavenly religions:" Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Groups and individuals impacted in recent years include Ahmadis, Koranists, Christians, and Sunni, Shi'a, and Sufi Muslims.

In 2010, government security officials arrested without charge 11 members of the country's small Ahmadi community; all were subsequently released within weeks or months. The Ahmadis were charged under Article 98(f) with "contempt for religion" and also on vague Emergency Law charges of undermining social cohesion. Although they were never prosecuted, the small Ahmadi community continues to fear government arrest and prosecution for alleged blasphemy.

Qur'anists—a tiny group that accepts only the Qur'an as the sole source of religious guidance and thus has been accused by the Egyptian government of deviating from Islamic law—during the reporting period, members of the Qur'anist community report discrimination in employment and continue to suffer from harassment and surveillance by security services. Authorities have prevented some members from leaving the country.

Over the years, the small Shi'a Muslim community has faced periodic discrimination, harassment, arrests, and imprisonment. In January 2012, Egyptian authorities closed the Shi'a Hussein mosque in Cairo to prevent Shi'a Muslims from observing Ashura. In December 2011, at least four Shi'a Muslims reportedly were detained and charged with "insulting and denying tenets" of Islam. Among the four was an Australian national, who was freed after one month in detention. The status of the other three is unknown. In September and October 2010, Egyptian authorities detained nearly 100 Shi'a Muslims. According to media reports, at least 12 of the Shi'a Muslims were accused by a state security court of "contempt of religion" and forming an illegal group to overthrow the government. Their current status is unknown.

On February 1, 2012, well-known Egyptian actor and comedian, Adel Imam, was sentenced to three months in prison and fined by a Cairo court for "contempt of religion" because of characters he portrayed in several films in recent years. In October 2011, a Cairo court sentenced Ayman Yusef Mansour to three years in jail with hard labor for "insulting" Islam in postings on Facebook. The court found that Mansour "intentionally insulted the dignity of the Islamic religion and attacked it with insults and ridicule on Facebook." In another case, Egyptian telecom mogul and Coptic Christian parliamentarian Naguib Sawiris was tried in January 2012 for blasphemy under Article 98(f) of the Penal Code because he tweeted cartoons in June 2011 of Mickey and Minnie Mouse wearing conservative Muslim attire. The case was dismissed in February.

#### *Islamists and Extremism*

The Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups which advocate or seek to establish an Islamic state in Egypt based on their interpretation of Islamic law were

illegal organizations during the Mubarak era under a law prohibiting political parties based on religion. While this prohibition remains in place even after amendments to the constitution went into effect in March 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups formed political parties on other platforms. In April 2011, a Muslim Brotherhood alliance formed the Freedom and Justice Party. Similarly, in June an alliance of ultra-conservative Salafi Muslims formed the Al-Nour Party.

The Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups have used violence in the past to achieve their aims, including the assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat in 1981 and attacks on foreign tourists. The Muslim Brotherhood publicly renounced violence in the 1970s. Under the Mubarak regime, Egyptian security forces arrested hundreds, if not thousands, of suspected Islamists every year, and some were subject to torture and/or prolonged detention without charge. Human rights groups that closely monitor the detention of such individuals claim that the vast majority are in prison as a result of their political beliefs or activities, and not on the basis of religion.

Human rights activists inside Egypt increasingly are concerned that extremist groups that support policies aimed at destroying the rights of others continue to advance in the country, with detrimental effects on the prospects for genuine democratic reform or improvements in freedom of religion or belief. During the transition period, Egypt has witnessed an increase in crime and lawlessness due to a decrease in police and security presence. Some Islamist militant groups have used this lapse to impose extra-judicial punishments. During the early months of the transition, Sufi Muslims experienced increased attacks and harassment by Islamist militant groups, as they deem as heretical a number of Sufi religious practices, including the veneration of saints. In Alexandria, extremists targeted at least 16 historic mosques belonging to Sufi orders and attempted to deface and destroy tombs of important Sufi Islamic scholars. In Qalyoub, north of Cairo, militants attacked at least five Sufi shrines. By the end of the reporting period, at least two people had been detained in relation to the attacks, although no one had been brought to justice.

#### *Incitement to violence in media and government-funded mosques*

In the months leading up to the November 2011 parliamentary elections, an increase in incitement to violence in Egyptian media and government-funded mosques exacerbated sectarian tensions between Muslims and Coptic Christians. In October, Egypt state media falsely accused Coptic Christians of attacking the Egyptian military during peaceful protests marching toward the Maspero state television station. State media called on Egyptian citizens to support the Egyptian military in “protecting Egypt” from Christian protestors. This incitement by state media led to counter-revolutionary elements and extremists attacking Coptic Christians (see more detail below).

During the reporting period, there continued to be reports of incitement and anti-Christian hatred espoused by imams in mosques. In recent years, some imams have incited large crowds to oppose and/or prevent the building and maintenance of churches, particularly in Upper Egypt. For example, in late September 2011, in the Aswan province, local imams incited at least 1,000 Muslim villagers, who subsequently set fire to the St. George Coptic Orthodox Church as well as some Christian-owned businesses and homes (see more detail below).

There continues to be intolerance of Jews and Baha'is in both the independent and government-controlled media. Material vilifying Jews with both historical and new anti-Semitic stereotypes appear regularly in the state-controlled and semi-official media. In February 2012, a Salafi leader and former parliamentary candidate in Alexandria, Abdel Moneim al-Shahat, publicly stated on the al-Haqiqa television program that Baha'is should be prosecuted for treason because they are apostates and are not entitled to any rights in Egypt.

#### *Violence Targeting Christians*

Since early 2011, hundreds of Egyptians were killed in the streets as a result of a decrease in security and a dramatic increase in violence. Violent sectarian attacks targeting Coptic Orthodox Christians and their property also increased significantly. In 2011, Coptic and human rights groups reported more than 40 sectarian incidents resulting in nearly 100 deaths, mostly Coptic Christians, surpassing the death toll of the previous 10 years combined. In most cases, perpetrators have not been convicted. In other cases, alleged perpetrators have been detained for short periods but eventually released without charge.

The ongoing violence, and the failure to prosecute those responsible, continued to foster a climate of impunity, especially in Upper Egypt. In recent years, in response to sectarian violence, Egyptian authorities have conducted “reconciliation” sessions between Muslims and Christians as a way of easing tensions and resolving disputes.

In some cases, authorities compelled victims to abandon their claims to any legal remedy. This continued during the reporting period. USCIRF has stated that reconciliation efforts should not be used to undermine enforcing the law and punishing perpetrators for wrongdoing. In recent years, the State Department concluded that reconciliation sessions not only “prevented the prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against Copts and precluded their recourse to the judicial system for restitution” but also “contributed to a climate of impunity that encouraged further assaults.”

Below are examples of violent incidents, primarily during the reporting period, impacting the Coptic Orthodox community, who comprise approximately 10 to 15 per cent of Egypt’s 80 million people.

In late January 2012, in the Sharbat village near Alexandria, Muslim villagers set on fire and destroyed several Christian-owned homes and businesses after a rumor surfaced about an alleged sexual relationship between a married Muslim woman and a Christian man. At least three people were injured. After reconciliation sessions convened by local politicians and religious leaders, eight Christian families were ordered to leave the village and to abandon their properties. Subsequently, a parliamentary delegation from Cairo visited the village and investigated the incidents. It concluded that the eviction of at least five of the Christian families should be overturned and their properties be returned. The delegation also blamed the local media for exaggerating facts and urged police to investigate to determine who was individually responsible for the destruction of Christian property and injuries suffered. An investigation is ongoing.

On October 9, 2011, at least 26 people were killed, mostly Coptic Orthodox Christians, and more than 300 injured in downtown Cairo after armed men confronted and attacked peaceful protesters. The demonstrators, both Christians and Muslims, were marching to the Maspero state television station to protest the September 30 destruction of a church in Aswan, Upper Egypt. Egyptian state-owned media incited the violence when broadcasters urged Egyptians to go out into the streets to protect security forces from attacks by Christian protesters. Responding to the violence, Egyptian military forces used live ammunition and excessive force, including armored vehicles that deliberately crushed and killed at least 12 protesters. Dozens of suspects have been detained and interrogated. In December, a Cairo court decided to release, pending further investigations, the remaining 27 Coptic Christian detainees arrested in connection with the violence. The investigation reportedly is ongoing.

On September 30, in the Aswan province, an estimated mob of more than 1,000 Muslims looted and burned the St. George Coptic Orthodox Church, as well as some Christian-owned businesses and homes, after incitement by local imams in village mosques. Local media reports indicated that a Ministry of Justice fact-finding mission traveled to Aswan on October 12, in the aftermath of the Maspero violence, to investigate the St. George church burning. According to the State Department, the status of the investigation is unknown. On May 8, at least 15 Christians and Muslims were killed and more than 200 people were wounded as Islamist extremists attacked Christians at the St. Mina Church in the Imbaba district of Cairo. Another church, the Church of the Virgin Mary, was burned to the ground and several Christian-owned shops were vandalized and looted. The government is prosecuting 48 individuals charged with murder, attempted murder, and a variety of other crimes. At the end of the reporting period, the prosecution is ongoing.

On March 8 in the Mokattam area of Cairo, 13 people were killed and nearly 150 wounded in clashes that erupted during large-scale demonstrations by Christians protesting the destruction of a church in the provincial town of Sol. The demonstrators called for rebuilding the church, punishment of perpetrators, and better treatment by Egyptian authorities. According to some accounts, troops from the Egyptian military stood by for as long as four hours without intervening. Egyptian officials said that all of those killed died of gunshot wounds, although it is still unclear who was responsible for the killings. While the SCAF expeditiously rebuilt the church by Easter, no one has been charged with the deaths. The status of the investigation is unknown.

On March 4, also in Sol, local Muslims set fire and destroyed a church after clashes between Christians and Muslims left two dead. The clashes reportedly resulted from a feud between the families of a Christian man and a Muslim woman who allegedly were having a romantic relationship. According to reports, there has been no investigation and no one has been brought to justice.

On February 23, the Egyptian military reportedly used excessive force and live ammunition at the Anba Bishoy monastery in Wadi Natroun, north of Cairo, to destroy a wall monks had built to defend their property from criminals recently set free from local prisons. One monk and six church workers were injured, and the monk later died. According to reports, military forces used heavy machine guns and

armored personnel carriers to bulldoze the wall. To date, no one has been held accountable.

On January 1, 2011, a bomb exploded at the Coptic Orthodox Church of the Two Saints (Al Qiddissin) in Alexandria where a New Year's prayer service was being held, killing at least 23 people and wounding approximately 100. At the end of the reporting period, there were no suspects in custody and no one has been brought to trial for murder. The Egyptian government reports that its investigation is ongoing.

On January 6, 2010, in the town of Naga Hammadi, Qena Governorate, three men sprayed automatic gunfire on Coptic churchgoers leaving midnight Christmas Mass, resulting in the deaths of six Christians and one off-duty Muslim police officer and several injuries. On January 16, 2011, a state security court convicted and sentenced to death one of the three, Mohamed Ahmed Hussein. On February 20, 2011, the court ratified the verdict against Hussein but acquitted the two other men, who were known to be accomplices in the killings. Hussein was executed on October 10, 2011. According to official Egyptian government media reports in November 2011, an Egyptian state security court intends to retry the two defendants who were acquitted.

In 2004, the Court of Cassation upheld the acquittal of 94 out of the 96 persons suspected of involvement in the killing of 21 Christians in Al-Kosheh in late 1999 and early 2000. Some Egyptian human rights groups believe that Egyptian authorities should still investigate claims of police negligence and inadequate prosecution of those involved in this earlier violence.

#### *Discrimination against Christians*

In addition to violence, Christians face official and societal discrimination. Although Egyptian government officials claim that there is no law or policy that prevents Christians from holding senior positions, the Coptic Orthodox Christian community faces de facto discrimination in appointments to high-level government and military posts. There are only a few Christians in the upper ranks of the security services and armed forces. There are no Christian governors out of 27 in the country, after the SCAF approved 11 new governors in August 2011. Previously there had been one Christian governor. There are only a handful of elected members of the People's Assembly out of 498 seats, no known university presidents or deans, and very few legislators or judges. According to the State Department, public university training programs for Arabic-language teachers exclude non-Muslims because the curriculum involves the study of the Qur'an. Under Egyptian law, Muslim men can marry Christian women but Muslim women are prohibited from marrying Christian men. Contacts between such persons are often a source of societal tension between Muslim and Christian communities in Egypt.

For all Christian groups, government permission is required to build a new church or repair an existing one, and the approval process for church construction is time-consuming and inflexible. Former President Mubarak had the authority to approve applications for new construction of churches. Although most of these applications were submitted more than five years ago, the majority have not received a response. Even some permits that have been approved cannot, in fact, be acted upon because of interference by the state security services at both the local and national levels.

In 2005, former President Mubarak devolved authority to approve the renovation and re-construction of churches from the president to the country's governors. Several years later, some churches continue to face delays in the issuance of permits. Even in cases where approval to build or maintain churches has been granted, many Christians complain that local security services have prevented construction or repair, in some cases for many years. In addition, local security services have been accused of being complicit in inciting violence against some churches undergoing routine maintenance or repair. In recent years, the government repeatedly has pledged, most recently in October 2011, to adopt a new law that would apply to all places of worship. In June, after consulting with religious leaders and other experts, the SCAF released publicly a draft version of the law. The draft was criticized widely by Muslims, Christians, and Egyptian human rights groups. While a subsequent version has not been made public, some reports have indicated that the revised draft law covers only churches and not other places of worship.

#### *Converts and Reconverts to Christianity*

Although neither the Constitution nor the Penal Code prohibits proselytizing or conversion, the Egyptian government has used Article 98(f) of the Penal Code to prosecute alleged proselytizing by non-Muslims. In some instances, converts, who fear government harassment if they officially register their change in religion from Islam to Christianity, reportedly have altered their own identification cards and



other official documents to reflect their new religious affiliation. Over the years, some individuals have been arrested for falsifying identity documents following conversion. Other converts have fled the country for fear of government and societal repercussions.

In 2008, Egypt's highest court ruled that 12 individuals who were born Christian could not be legally prohibited from returning to Christianity after converting to Islam. However, the court ruled that their identity documents must list them as "formerly declared Muslim," thus potentially making them subject to continued discrimination, police harassment, and societal violence. On July 3, 2011, the Supreme Administrative Court ruled that reconverts to Christianity would be permitted to obtain new national identity documents indicating their Christian faith without having to be listed as former Muslims. In October 2011, the first known implementation of the new ruling was made public when an Egyptian mother's twin sons received new identity cards identifying them as Christian.

In addition, reports in recent years support claims that there were cases of Muslim men forcing Coptic Christian women to convert to Islam. The State Department has asserted that such cases are often disputed and include "inflammatory allegations and categorical denials of kidnapping and rape." For example, there were credible cases in which Coptic girls voluntarily converted to Islam to marry Muslim men, and subsequently, when the relationship failed, sought to return to Christianity. Nevertheless, during the reporting period, experts and human rights groups have found that there were also credible cases where Coptic Christian women were lured deceptively into marriages with Muslim men and forced to convert to Islam. According to these reports, if a woman returns or escapes from the marriage and wants to convert back to Christianity, she faces the same legal hurdles in changing her religious affiliation on official identity documents as discussed above.

In contrast to the re-conversion cases, the Egyptian government generally does not recognize conversions of Muslims to other religions. Egyptian courts also have refused to allow Muslims who convert to Christianity to change their identity cards to reflect their conversions. In the first such case, brought by Muhammad Hegazy, a lower court ruled in January 2008 that Muslims are forbidden from converting from Islam based on principles of Islamic law because conversion would constitute a disparagement of the official state religion and entice other Muslims to convert. Hegazy is currently in hiding and has appealed the ruling. The second such case was brought in 2009 by Maher El-Gohary, who went into hiding for two and a half years because of threats and harassment by extremists. El-Gohary, with whom the USCIRF delegation met during its January 2010 visit, fled Egypt in late February 2011 when his travel ban was lifted just days after former president Mubarak stepped down. El-Gohary has applied for asylum in France with his 16 year-old daughter.

#### *Baha'is*

All Baha'i institutions and community activities have been banned since 1960 by a presidential decree. As a result, the approximately 2,000 Baha'is who live in Egypt are unable to meet or engage in communal religious activities. In the past, Baha'is have been arrested and imprisoned because of their religious beliefs, often on charges of insulting Islam. There have been no arrests in recent years. Most Baha'i community members are known to the state security services, and many are regularly subject to surveillance and other forms of harassment. Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Center has issued fatwas over the years, most recently in 2003, urging the continued ban on the Baha'i community and condemning Baha'is as apostates.

Intolerance of Baha'is has increased in both the independent and government-controlled media in recent years. In March 2009, Muslim villagers vandalized several Baha'i homes in a village in the Sohag province. Egyptian human rights groups immediately condemned the violence and contended that it had been prompted by incitement by a media commentator who, during a television program, labeled an individual member of the Baha'i faith an apostate and called for her to be killed. Three years after the incident, there has been no investigation or prosecution. In late February 2011, after rumors that the Baha'i families would be returning to the homes vandalized in 2009, local villagers set on fire several Baha'i homes in the Sohag province. An Egyptian human rights group alleged that at least two local security officers incited local villagers to attack the homes. An investigation is ongoing.

There has been some legal progress for Baha'is related to identity documents. In March 2009, the Supreme Administrative Court rejected a final legal challenge to a 2008 lower court ruling that required the Egyptian government to issue national identification documents to three Baha'i plaintiffs containing a dash or other mark in the religion field. Until this ruling, identity documents permitted registration in

only one of the three officially approved faiths—Islam, Christianity, or Judaism—thereby effectively preventing Baha'is from gaining the official recognition necessary to have access to numerous public services. Since the 2008 decision, the government has issued birth certificates to at least 120 Baha'is, documents which it previously refused to issue to them. In addition, approximately 20 to 30 single male and female Baha'is have received identity cards. However, no married couples have been able to receive identity cards because the Egyptian government does not recognize Baha'i marriages. Over the past few years, some Baha'is lost their jobs and a few young Baha'is were dismissed from universities because they did not have identity cards.

During the reporting period, representatives of the Baha'i community have had discussions with the SCAF and transitional government; however, there have been no long-term resolutions to their ongoing concerns.

#### *Anti-Semitism and the Jewish Community*

In 2011, material vilifying Jews with both historical and new anti-Semitic stereotypes continued to appear regularly in the state-controlled and semi-official media. This material includes anti-Semitic cartoons, images of Jews and Jewish symbols that reference Israel or Zionism, comparisons of Israeli leaders to Hitler and the Nazis, and Holocaust denial literature. Egyptian authorities have not taken adequate steps to combat anti-Semitism in the media, despite official claims that they have advised journalists to avoid anti-Semitism. Egyptian officials claim that anti-Semitic statements in the media are a reaction to Israeli government policy toward Palestinians and do not reflect historical anti-Semitism. Human rights groups cite persistent, virulent anti-Semitism in the education system, which increasingly is under the influence of Islamist extremists, a development the Egyptian government has not adequately addressed.

The small remnant of Egypt's once sizeable Jewish community, now consisting of fewer than 100 people, owns communal property and finances required maintenance largely through private donations. In 2007, Egyptian authorities, including the Minister of Culture and the head of the Ministry's Supreme Council of Antiquities, pledged to move forward over the next few years with the restoration of at least seven synagogues, as well as the possible development of a Jewish museum, sought by the Jewish community to memorialize Egypt's substantial and historic Jewish religious and cultural properties and relics. Restoration of the Maimonides synagogue in Cairo, named after a 12th century rabbinic scholar, was completed in March 2010, although Egyptian government authorities canceled an official public dedication ceremony.

#### *Jehovah's Witnesses*

A 1960 presidential decree banned all Jehovah's Witnesses activities. According to the State Department, there are between 800 and 1,200 Jehovah's Witnesses living in Egypt. While government interference into the activities of the small community has abated somewhat since former President Mubarak stepped down in February 2011, Egyptian authorities continue to conduct surveillance and sometimes impede their private worship. In past years, secret police monitored the homes, phones, and private meeting places of members. The Egyptian government permits Jehovah's Witnesses to meet in private homes in groups of less than 30 people, despite the community's request to meet in larger numbers.

For years, the Jehovah's Witnesses have pursued legal recognition through the court system. Finally, in December 2009, the Seventh Circuit Administrative Court handed down a verdict denying Jehovah's Witnesses legal status. The local community continues to appeal the verdict.

#### *Egypt's Universal Periodic Review*

In February 2010, the UN Human Rights Council examined the human rights record of Egyptian authorities under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) procedure. The head of Egypt's delegation stated that freedom of religion and worship are guaranteed in the constitution and are not limited by law, despite the reality that, as described above, in practice the law is arbitrarily and inconsistently applied. The Egyptian delegation also characterized relations between Muslims and Coptic Christians as "healthy and positive," attributing recent sectarian tensions to extremism and asserting that the law is implemented whenever violent incidents occur.

The recommendations that the Egyptian delegation supported at the UPR included those that urged the government to take all necessary measures to guarantee religious freedom, prevent discrimination that affects this freedom, and promote inter-religious dialogue and tolerance. The delegation rejected recommendations which urged the Egyptian government to remove any categorization of religion on official government documents and to eliminate the legal and bureaucratic restric-

tions that complicate an individual's right to choose his or her religion. Despite supporting a number of recommendations from the UPR, the Egyptian government has made little progress in implementing them in practice.

*Positive Developments in Egypt*

During the transition, there have been some positive developments. In January 2012, the Interior Ministry stated publicly that it worked with the SCAF on an extensive security plan to protect all churches around the celebration of Coptic Christmas. According to some reports, members of the Muslim Brotherhood also have participated in protecting churches. The 2011-2012 holiday season passed without incident. In May, the government began to re-open more than 50 churches that had been closed, in some cases for years. In March, the Egyptian government released Coptic Christian priest Mitaus Wahba from prison, where he had served three years of a five-year sentence for presiding over a wedding of a Christian convert from Islam.

In the aftermath of the October Maspero violence, the government took steps to reduce discrimination in the Penal Code. On October 15, the SCAF issued a decree amending Egypt's Penal Code to prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion, gender, language, faith, or race. The decree also delineated prison sentences and specific fines for discriminatory acts, as well as failure to prevent discrimination. These included more severe penalties for government officials found to be complicit in discrimination. These new Penal Code provisions, if applied, could strengthen the Egyptian constitution's ban on discrimination. At the end of the reporting period, however, there were no known cases in which the government applied the new amendments.

During the reporting period, Al-Azhar University spearheaded a number of initiatives and published statements expressing support for freedom of religion or belief in Egypt. In January 2012, Al-Azhar Grand Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tayeb put forward a "Bill of Rights" that discussed the importance of freedom of belief and expression, among other things, ahead of the drafting of the constitution. The statement asserts that "freedom of belief" and equal citizenship rights for all Egyptians are the cornerstones of a new modern society. The statement reportedly took three months to gain support of a number of diverse religious and political leaders in Egypt, as well as other domestic and international actors.

In June 2011, the Grand Sheikh released an 11-point program, known as the "Al-Azhar Document," setting out Al-Azhar's vision for Egypt's democratic future. The document endorsed a democratic government in Egypt, placing governance in the hands of the civil or secular powers of the parliament, the executive, and the judiciary. The document also expressed support for universal human rights and emphasized that religious minorities should be able to practice their religion freely and enjoy their rights as citizens in full equality with the majority. Some human rights groups have expressed concern over the document's vagueness, pointing out the lack of safeguards needed to prevent human rights abuses. Moreover, while both the January 2012 and June 2011 documents call for full respect and protection of the three "heavenly religions"—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—no other faiths in Egypt were mentioned.

*U.S. Policy*

For many years, U.S. policy toward Egypt had focused on fostering strong bilateral relations, continuing security and military cooperation, maintaining regional stability, and sustaining the 1979 Camp David peace accords. Successive administrations viewed Egypt as a key ally in the region. Until a few years ago, Egypt was the second largest recipient of U.S. aid; it now ranks fourth, behind Afghanistan, Israel, and Pakistan. In recent years, including during the reporting period, the Obama administration and Congress have increased efforts to urge the Egyptian government to make more expeditious progress on economic and political reforms, including on human rights and religious freedom issues. During the past year, the relationship encountered a number of challenges, the most serious of which started in December 2011 when Egyptian authorities raided the offices of five foreign pro-democracy NGOs, four of which are American, and subsequently charged staff members with working without a license and receiving unauthorized foreign funding.

During the first few days of the January 2011 uprisings in Egypt, the Obama administration remained supportive of the Mubarak regime. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressed confidence that the regime was stable and urged peaceful protests by the Egyptian people. As the demonstrations continued and grew, high-level U.S. government officials expressed concern about incidents of government violence against peaceful protestors, and President Obama advocated that Mubarak step down. Mubarak did so on February 11, 2011. In March 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Egypt and the U.S. government announced that \$100 million

in unspent economic support funds were being reprogrammed to support economic growth and development, in addition to \$65 million being reprogrammed to support democratic development in Egypt.

In the current reporting period, the U.S. government highlighted religious freedom concerns in Egypt through public statements and remarks more frequently than in previous years. For example, in January 2012, Deputy Secretary of State William Burns and Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Michael Posner each publicly raised a number of religious freedom issues while visiting Egypt. On January 6, 2012, President Obama released a statement on Coptic Christmas eve asserting that in Egypt and elsewhere “freedom of religion, the protection of people of all faiths, and the ability to worship as you choose are critical to a peaceful, inclusive and thriving society.” In October 2011, statements from both President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton expressed deep concern about the Maspero violence and called for a prompt investigation, including into allegations of excessive security and police force. On May 19, 2011, President Obama delivered a major policy speech on the Middle East and North Africa and specifically raised the importance of freedom of religion, respecting religious minorities, and the plight of Coptic Christians in Egypt. On January 1, 2011, President Obama issued a strong statement condemning the New Year’s Day bombing of a church targeting Christians in Alexandria and offered assistance to the Egyptian government to bring the perpetrators to justice.

U.S. assistance reflects the recognition of Egypt’s continued and crucial role in ensuring Arab-Israeli peace. P.L. 112-74, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012, appropriated \$1.3 billion in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) assistance and \$250 million for Economic Support Fund (ESF) assistance. For the first time, the law requires the Secretary of State to certify that the Egyptian government is using the funds appropriated through the Foreign Military Financing program to support “the transition to civilian government including holding free and fair elections” and “implementing policies to protect freedom of expression, association, and religion, and due process of law.” The law also includes a national security interest waiver from the certification requirements. In seeking to meet the certification requirement, the State Department must report about positive progress and trends in Egypt only on the requirement about policies to protect freedom of religion. USCIRF worked with Congressional offices on including freedom of religion as one of the certification factors.

In recent years, only a small portion of U.S. programming has supported initiatives in areas related to religious freedom, including funding for programs of the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services that work with Coptic and Muslim community groups in Upper Egypt, as well as support for NGOs that monitor the country’s media for sectarian bias. During the past year, the Obama administration reversed a controversial 2009 decision that restricted USAID funding for Egyptian civil society to those organizations whose official NGO registration has been approved by the Egyptian government. Direct grants to registered Egyptian NGOs previously had to be vetted by the Egyptian government. As a consequence, many new Egyptian NGOs did not seek formal registration, and instead formed a civil corporation, to avoid unnecessary government interference and oversight.

In July 2011, the Egyptian government launched an investigation into U.S. funding of civil corporations, suggesting that it violates Egyptian law. This cast serious doubt on the ability of the U.S. government to support the programs and activities it was already funding. The investigations culminated in December 2011 with raids on the offices of four American, and one European, pro-democracy NGOs and confiscation of materials from these offices. In January 2012, the Egyptian government announced criminal charges against 43 personnel, including 16 Americans, and issued travel bans against those remaining in the country, including seven Americans. Despite Egyptian judicial authorities lifting the travel ban in late February, staff members from these NGOs, including from the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, and Freedom House, face criminal charges and possible prison terms for working illegally in the country without a license and receiving and using unauthorized foreign funding. Since the raids on NGOs in December, an increasing number of members of Congress have advocated cutting off all U.S. aid to Egypt, although, at the end of the reporting period, no measure has been passed in Congress prohibiting aid to Egypt.

After former President Mubarak was removed from power, several congressional resolutions were introduced in the House and Senate in the 112th Congress to: encourage religious freedom (H.Res.459); express solidarity with the Egyptian people’s democratic aspirations (H.Res. 88); respect human rights and the freedoms of religion and expression (H.Res. 200); support democracy, universal rights and the peaceful transition to a representative government (S. Res. 44); condemn the New

Year's day attack on the Coptic church in Alexandria and urge the Egyptian government to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators (S.Res.22); and support democracy, human rights, and civil liberties (S. Res. 586).

In September 2011, in its most recent International Religious Freedom report, the State Department again concluded that religious freedom conditions remained poor, similar to its 2010 conclusion. From 2007 to 2009, the State Department reported that religious freedom conditions in Egypt had declined. This assertion did not result in any significant change in U.S. policy towards Egypt other than the increase in public comments and statements discussed above.

#### *Recommendations*

As described above, the Egyptian government has engaged in and tolerated religious freedom violations during the transition period. During the reporting period, violence targeting Coptic Orthodox Christians increased and the Egyptian government failed to convict those responsible for the violence. In addition, the Egyptian government has failed to protect religious minorities from violent attacks during the transitional period when minority communities have been increasingly vulnerable. During the transition period, military and security forces used excessive force and live ammunition targeting Christian demonstrators and places of worship resulting in dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries. Despite claims by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces that it dismantled the state security apparatus, partially lifted the state of emergency, and addressed some ongoing religious freedom concerns, discriminatory laws and policies continue to have a negative impact on freedom of religion or belief in Egypt.

Accordingly, based on the Egyptian government's systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations, USCIRF is recommending for the second year in a row that Egypt be designated a country of particular concern, or CPC. Pursuant to the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-74), the U.S. government should not certify the disbursement of military assistance to Egypt until the Egyptian government demonstrates that it is using the funds appropriated through the Foreign Military Financing program to implement policies that protect freedom of religion and related human rights in Egypt. The U.S. government also should direct a portion of existing military assistance and emergency economic assistance to enhance security for religious minority communities. In addition, the United States should press the Egyptian transitional government, as well as the future civilian government and newly elected parliament, to implement a series of reforms to advance freedom of religion or belief and related human rights.

#### **I. Withholding Military Assistance and Directing a Targeted Amount of Military and Economic Assistance During Egypt's Transition**

In addition to designating Egypt as a CPC, the U.S. government should:

- pursuant to the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-74), not certify the disbursement of the appropriated \$1.3 billion in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to Egypt until the Egyptian government demonstrates that it is using FMF funds to implement policies that protect freedom of religion and related human rights in Egypt;
- once the Egyptian government so demonstrates, ensure that a portion of the FMF funding for the Egyptian government is used to help the Egyptian police assess security needs and develop and implement a comprehensive and effective plan for dedicated police protection for religious minority communities and their places of worship, particularly Coptic Orthodox Christians, Sufi Muslims, and Jews, in consultation with these communities' representatives; and
- conduct or support specialized training, either in Egypt or abroad, for Egyptian military and police forces on human rights standards and non-lethal responses to crowd control and to quell sectarian violence.

The U.S. Congress should:

- require the Departments of State and Defense to report every 90 days on the Egyptian transitional government's progress on the issues described in this section.

#### **II. Ensuring that Responsibility for Religious Affairs Not Fall Within the Jurisdiction of the New Egyptian Domestic Security Agency**

The U.S. government should urge the Egyptian government to:

- repeal fully the state of emergency, in existence since 1981, in order to allow for the full consolidation of the rule of law in Egypt;
- ensure that de facto responsibility for religious affairs does not fall under the jurisdiction of the domestic security agency, with the exception of espionage cases or cases involving the use or advocacy of violence, including conspiracy to commit acts of terror;

- pass a unified law that would subject all places of worship to the same transparent, non-discriminatory, and efficient regulations regarding construction and maintenance, and continue to take special measures to preserve and restore Coptic Orthodox and other Christian properties and antiquities that have been subject to societal violence and official neglect; and
- consistent with the March and December 2011 resolutions of the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly on “combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence against persons based on religion or belief,” repeal Article 98(f) of the Penal Code, which “prohibits citizens from ridiculing or insulting heavenly religions or inciting sectarian strife” and, in the interim, provide the constitutional and international guarantees of the rule of law and due process for those individuals charged with violating Article 98(f).

### III. Implementing Additional Reform in Order to Comply with International Human Rights Standards

The U.S. government should urge the transitional Egyptian government and newly elected parliament to:

- ensure that a new constitution has robust protections for the right to freedom of religion or belief consistent with international human rights law, including:
  - recognizing the universal right to the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief for every individual and every religious or belief community;
  - recognizing that each person’s freedom to hold and to manifest any religion or belief, or not to hold any religious belief, should not be limited, aside from the narrow exceptions delineated in international law;
  - affirming that the right to freedom of religion or belief includes the right to have, adopt, or change one’s own religion or belief without coercion and to manifest it publicly, as well as to persuade others to change their beliefs or affiliations voluntarily;
  - ensuring that the rights and benefits of citizenship are not limited to individuals belonging to particular religious communities; and
  - ensuring that all persons are equal before the law and are entitled to the equal protection of law, regardless of religion or belief, and guaranteeing all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on religious grounds;
- ensure the neutral non-discriminatory application of any laws according legal status and benefits to religious communities, even if one faith is declared as the official state religion;
- establish a special unit in the Office of the Public Prosecutor dedicated to investigating acts of violence against Egyptian citizens on the basis of religion or belief, vigorously prosecuting and bringing to justice perpetrators, and ensuring compensation for victims;
- address incitement to imminent violence and discrimination against disfavored Muslims and non-Muslims by:
  - prosecuting in regular criminal courts government-funded clerics, government officials, or individuals who incite violence against Muslim minority communities or individual members of non-Muslim religious minority communities;
  - disciplining or dismissing government-funded clerics who espouse intolerance;
  - publicly and officially refuting incitement to violence and discrimination by clerics and the government-controlled media against Muslim minority communities, such as the Qur’anists, and members of non-Muslim religious minorities, such as Baha’is; and
  - rescinding any previously-issued fatwas by Al-Azhar that are discriminatory toward or incite violence against Muslim minority communities or non-Muslim religious minority communities;
- discontinue the use of reconciliation sessions as a bypass for punishing perpetrators, commensurate with the gravity of the crime and in accordance with the rule of law;
- practicing their faith, officially grant legal personality to these and other minority faiths, and permit these faiths to congregate in public places of worship without government interference;
- remove mention of religious affiliation from national identity documents;
- cease all messages of hatred and intolerance in the government-controlled media and take active measures to promote understanding and respect for members of minority religious communities;
- take all appropriate steps to prevent and punish acts of anti-Semitism, including condemnation of anti-Semitic acts, and, while vigorously protecting freedom

of expression, counteract anti-Semitic rhetoric and other organized anti-Semitic activities;

- permit any Egyptian citizen to learn voluntarily the Coptic language in the public school system; and
- investigate claims of police negligence and inadequate prosecution of those involved in the Al-Kosheh case, as well as other recent instances of violence targeting individuals on account of their religion or belief, particularly members of the vulnerable Coptic Orthodox Christian community.

#### IV. Ensuring that U.S. Government Aid Promotes Prompt and Genuine Political and Legal Reforms and is Offered Directly to Egyptian Civil Society Groups

The U.S. government should:

- provide direct support to human rights and other civil society or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) without vetting by the Egyptian government;
- urge the Egyptian government to ensure that NGOs engaged in human rights work can pursue their activities without government interference, and monitor and report to what extent this is accomplished; and
- expand support of initiatives to advance human rights, promote religious tolerance, and foster civic education among all Egyptians, including support for:
  - revising all textbooks and other educational materials to remove any language or images that promote enmity, intolerance, hatred, or violence toward any group of persons based on faith, gender, ethnicity, or nationality, and including the concepts of tolerance and respect for human rights of all persons, including religious freedom, in all school curricula, textbooks, and teacher training;
  - civic education and public awareness programs that reflect the multi-confessional nature of Egyptian society and the diversity of Egypt's religious past;
  - efforts by Egyptian and international NGOs to review Egyptian educational curricula and textbooks for messages of hatred, intolerance, and the advocacy of violence, and to monitor equal access to education by girls and boys regardless of religion or belief; and
  - preserving and restoring Egyptian Jewish properties and antiquities in publicly accessible sites.

#### V. Promoting Freedom of Religion and Belief and Related Human Rights in Multilateral Fora

The U.S. government should:

- call on the Egyptian government to comply with and fully implement recommendations from the UN Human Rights Council's February 2010 Universal Periodic Review of Egypt, including those related to freedom of religion or belief; and
- urge the Egyptian government to invite, provide specific dates, and admit UN special procedures mandate holders who are waiting for an invitation, including the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture.

#### *Dissenting Statement of Commissioner al-Hibri:*

So much is happening in Egypt this year. The peaceful revolution has been unfortunately marred by violence that spread across Egypt from Maspéro to Aswan to Port Said. Over 850 Egyptians have died during this period, around 6,000 were injured, and the dust has not settled yet. The transitional military government has not done enough to stem the violence and, as the report points out, together with the official media, it encouraged sectarian violence by counterrevolutionaries and extremists in Maspéro.

At the same time, al-Azhar, the venerable religious institution, extended its hand in dialogue to the Coptic leadership, including the late Pope Shenouda. Also, Egyptians spoke loud and clear in the streets and on private television, rejecting sectarian and other violence. The photo on the cover of the report shows average Egyptians, Muslim and Coptic, mourning the victims of the Maspéro violence. Many Egyptians carried signs saying "Muslim + Christian = Egyptian." Now Egyptians are voting for a new parliament, and a new government and constitution. I believe in the fundamental fairness of the Egyptian people and their ability to ultimately rebuild a nation based on religious freedom. After all, this is a tradition that has deep roots in their history.

For this reason, I respectfully dissent from designating Egypt as a CPC at a time when the whole nation is undergoing indiscriminate violence. I would also revisit the situation after the election of a democratic government and the drafting of the new constitution.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MICHELE CLARK, ADJUNCT PROFESSOR, THE ELLIOTT  
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Mr. Chairman, it is an honor to be invited to testify once more on this most important issue of the disappearances, forced conversions and forced marriages of Coptic Christian women and girls. I would like to express my thanks to the Commission for holding this hearing and launching this new report. I would also like to express my thanks to Christian Solidarity International, and in particular to Dr. John Eibner, CEO, for championing this issue and sponsoring the research and writing of the report we are discussing here. I would also like to express my thanks to Nadia Ghaly, the co-author of this report, who is not able to be here today, for her invaluable collaboration in this effort.

My testimony is based directly on the report introduced today, "The Disappearance, Forced Conversions and Forced Marriages of Coptic Christian Women and Girls in Egypt II", and I would therefore like to request that the report be included along with my testimony into the record of these hearings.

Coptic women in Egypt are disappearing from their homes, their schools and their jobs. They go missing while returning from church, picking up their children from school or traveling to the sick bed of an aging parent. They are often held as captives, subjected to physical and psychological abuse in the form of rapes, beatings, domestic labor without pay, forced marriage and conversion to Islam. Their lives, and the lives of their families, are severely damaged.

The Egyptian government has distanced itself from any responsibility or culpability. Those who dispute these claims assert that the disappearances are merely willful acts of young women seeking to leave oppressive home environments and that there is no criminal activity involved.

To investigate these claims, Christian Solidarity International and the Coptic Foundation for Human Rights Commissioned a report written in November 2009 which asserted that Coptic women and underage girls are deceptively lured into forced marriages with Muslim men and conversion to Islam; that the Egyptian authorities dismiss the criminality of such events; that the young women are presumed to be complicit in their disappearances; that the disappearances follow consistent patterns; that the Egyptian government rarely restores their Christian identities to women who have been forcibly converted to Islam.

This report marked the beginning of renewed discussion on the topic, including a hearing in front of this very Commission last summer.

Other US Government agencies were more skeptical.

For example, the 2010 US Department of States Annual Trafficking in Persons Report referenced our report, and stated that "During the reporting period, an international NGO released a report about alleged forced marriages of Coptic females in Egypt, indicating an allegation of forced prostitution, though the allegations have not been confirmed."

The 2010 Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report also referred to our report, stating,

"As in previous years, there were occasional claims of Muslim men forcing Coptic women and girls to convert to Islam. Reports of such cases were disputed and often included inflammatory allegations and categorical denials of kidnapping and rape. In November 2009 an international Christian advocacy group published a report regarding alleged cases of forced conversion; however, well-respected local human rights groups were unable to verify such cases and found it extremely difficult to determine whether compulsion was used, as most cases involved a female Copt who converted to Islam when she married a male Muslim. Reports of such cases almost never appear in the local media."

Before entering in the details of the new report, I would like to make one important point: Claims that all disappearances are the result of impulsive behaviors and not abduction reflect a misunderstanding of the force, fraud and coercion that are characteristic of the relationships between young Coptic women and girls and their captors. Both Nadia Ghaly and I recognize that not all disappearances are the result of abductions, that not all marriages are forced, and that some conversions can be consensual. We have spoken with a young woman who quite candidly left her husband because he beat her while her make Muslim neighbor was kind. She eventually returned to her family.

However, and notwithstanding the ambiguity of many situations we encountered, we claim that it is not possible to dismiss each case in the 2009 report on the grounds that the girls willingly and left their families.

And, since this first report, it is possible to say that stories of abductions and disappearances of Coptic women and girls are for the first time garnering attention in the mainstream media. On December 15, 2010, the BBC aired a documentary enti-



tled, "Christian Minority under Pressure in Egypt." In the opening scene, a father relates to the interviewer that there will be no Christmas in their home this year; their daughter, who loved Christmas, was abducted and has never returned.

On June 15, 2011, Yasmin el Rashdi, writing *New York Review of Books* on June 15, 2011, quotes a parish priest who raises the issue of the disappearance of young Coptic women.

"There are no sizable attacks," he said, "but each week there are incidents of women having the cross grabbed from their necks as they walk in the streets. In this very neighborhood people are still being insulted as they leave church; and we still have young girls disappearing, kidnapped, being harassed for what they are wearing or for bearing the cross tattooed on their wrists."

Since the publication of our first report, the political landscape has changed considerably in Egypt. The Coptic community has become more vulnerable to persecution as a result of an upsurge in militant Islam following the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak. Emigration is increasing and asylum petitions in both the United States and other countries are on the rise. Young Coptic women are particularly vulnerable. Exploitation thrives in times of political unrest.

Among the most vulnerable members of this beleaguered community are women and young girls. Young Coptic women are applying for asylum on the basis of fear of being abducted and forced to convert and marry. In September 2011, I testified in federal court as an expert witness in one such asylum case. Asylum was granted for a young Coptic woman on the basis of fear of being abducted should she return. Other immigration lawyers attest to recent favorable asylum decisions based on threat or fear of abduction. We have here, as witnesses in this hearing, two young women who have sought and received asylum because of abduction and fear of abductions. These cases are not allegations.

#### A SECOND REPORT

Concerned with the escalating violence against the Copts in Egypt and dissatisfied with the lack of response from the US Government, Christian Solidarity International commissioned a second report, which we are launching here today. This new report substantiates our earlier findings. In addition, we have observed changes in trends and patterns, which reinforce the pre-meditation of the captors.

The goal of our second report is straightforward: To continue to support the claims of disappearances, abductions and forced conversions and forced marriages of Coptic women in Egypt and continue to challenge the use of the term "allegation" in US government reports.

The new findings in the report are based on:

1. Interviews with four Egyptian lawyers. These lawyers provided access to claims filed by families on behalf of Coptic women who had disappeared as well as young women who had returned from a forced marriage and conversion and were attempting to regain their Christian identities;
2. Interviews with representatives of civil society organizations;
3. Interviews with family members of young women who have disappeared. Some of these individuals are represented by attorneys;
4. A review of Internet sites reporting the disappearance of Coptic girls. The authors considered only those cases with appropriate documentation, including police reports.
5. Interviews with women who have returned from a forced marriage and conversion.

All interviews were conducted from November 16-25, 2011, in Cairo, Egypt. Only verifiable cases are included in this report. Each of these cases is verifiable through attorney files, personal interviews and police reports. The real names of young women and their family members and other identifying details are not published in this report in order to protect their identities.

#### KEY FINDINGS

##### *1. The number of disappearances and abductions appear to be increasing.*

Exact numbers of cases throughout the country are difficult to come by for reasons analyzed below. However, each of the attorneys interviewed for this report indicated an increase in his caseload since January 2011. Four attorneys collectively report a total of over 550 cases of abductions, disappearances and petitions to restore Christian identity following abductions, forced marriages and forced conversions over a five-year period. Furthermore, one attorney interviewed for this report indicates first-hand knowledge of over 1,600 cases of Christians petitioning to have their conversions to Islam overturned in recent years, with 60% of this number

being women; in other words, 960 women are petitioning to have their Christian identities restored.

#### *Data Collection Challenges*

There is no systematic data repository within the Coptic community documenting the disappearances of young women. Priests or bishops keep records of activities within their churches and communities. Attorneys maintain their own caseloads. Activists maintain different websites but there is no cross-referencing with other data sources.

Families of victims do not report all cases. The police do not register all complaints filed by family members. In many cases, family members of missing young women reported that the police would not file a report until a lawyer intervened. In other cases, families do not file reports because they do not believe that their claims will be taken seriously or because they fear retribution by the authorities. Not all families are financially able to secure the services of an attorney; while not a guarantee of results, the presence of an attorney would at least enable the filing of a legitimate claim.

#### *2. Fewer girls appear to be returning to their families*

Our 2009 report focused on young women who had returned from forced marriages and conversions and were struggling to regain their Christian identities. They reported instances of abuse and forced domestic servitude; one woman reported being prostituted by her captor. Since then, there has been a discernible change in the dynamics of the disappearances of young Coptic women. Attorneys handling such cases report that fewer young women are being returned to their families. There is speculation that young women might be trafficked overseas, but attorneys and activists have not yet been able to document this phenomenon.

#### *3. Social Media*

Many families are learning about their daughters' conversion to Islam through new Internet sites which document the conversion to Islam of Christian girls. Increasing websites are appearing which feature fully veiled young Coptic women and girls announcing their conversion to Islam. On the other hand, Coptic families are beginning to post announcements of disappearances also on the internet.

#### *4. Minors and mothers of young children appear to be increasingly targeted.*

In addition to disappearances of single young women over the age of 18, lawyers report an increase in the abductions of mothers with young children. While the age of consent to convert to a different religion is eighteen in Egypt, there are increasing reports that children of mothers who are forced to convert are also registered as Muslims. Even if a mother returns to her community, the children are considered by law to be Muslim and will remain Muslim.

#### *5. Disappearances are organized and planned.*

Attorneys, social workers and members of the clergy interviewed for this and the previous report all attest to organized and systematic planning in cases of missing Coptic women. Tactics to lure young women into relationships follow similar patterns throughout the country. One lawyer interviewed for this report stated that the same man's name occurred in several police reports; he married five Christian women who subsequently converted to Islam. Family members report that their daughters or sisters were befriended by a schoolmate, a neighbor, or an older mother figure over time. Lawyers indicate that their clients report that the families of the captors benefited materially; frequently, family members were provided with new apartments or furniture, and unemployable young men were given jobs.

#### *6. Abductors target vulnerable women and girls, and girls in vulnerable and unprotected moments.*

The concluding observations of the UN's Commission on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) express concern "at the very limited information and statistics provided about vulnerable groups of women and girls" in Egypt.

Coptic women and girls are vulnerable in the following ways:

1. They are members of a religious minority.
2. They come from closed, insular communities.
3. Their minority status is the basis for legal and social discrimination

Coptic women and girls are vulnerable because of their minority status, yet little effort is made by the Egyptian Government to document this vulnerability or its consequences.

#### *7. Captors sever contact between victims and their families.*

The first task of the captor is to come between a young woman and members of her family. They can do this by force, taking away her phone and family connections. They lock her up, denying her any mobility. They threaten her, telling her

that, even if she runs away, her family will never accept her; they will punish her and put her in a monastery. Eventually a young woman is brainwashed and believes that she will be safe only with her Muslim captor. Ultimately, she will be truly safe only if she converts to Islam. Because there is no obligation for a Christian woman who marries a Muslim man to convert to Islam, one attorney claims that conversion is the ultimate goal of the captivity.

*8. Captors make use of measures involving force, fraud and coercion.*

A young woman consents to a glass of sugar cane juice and the attention of a man whose words promise a life of love, ease and provision. Another woman shares a with a mother who is also waiting for children after school. And a third seeks friendship and escape from a harsh and sometimes abusive home environment. Victims who have not literally been abducted nonetheless did not consent to being ripped from their family without the possibility of ever seeing them again; nor do they consent to being forcibly converted to a religion other than their own. They do not consent to a life of captivity within one small apartment, every outing supervised by a member of her new husband's family. They said yes to the things that young women say yes to: friendship, romance, hope, a future, safety and security. It is reasonable to expect that most young women would respond in precisely the same way as many young Coptic girls responded to these offers of friendship or romance.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

In developing recommendations for this report, the authors consulted with attorneys and civil society actors in Egypt in order to assess what government actions might support their efforts to protect Coptic women from falling into captivity and, as a result, into forced marriages and conversions. There was considerable consensus as to steps that the government might take.

*Egyptian Government*

1. Local police stations will take seriously and file reports on all claims of disappearance of Coptic women and girls. All claims will be investigated and family members kept apprised of the progress of each of these cases.
2. The Egyptian national government will request an annual accounting of all cases of disappearances including open and ongoing cases as well as any prosecutions that resulted from local police investigations.
3. The Egyptian government will create a registry to document the disappearance of minors.
4. Children of parents who convert will retain the religion of their birth until they are 18 years of age, the legal age of consent.
5. The legal age for conversion to Islam will be raised to 18, which is the age of legal consent in Egypt.
6. Laws which penalize discrimination based on religion in the areas of education, employment and the media will be enacted.

*Coptic Church*

1. The Coptic Church will maintain a central registry documenting instances of disappearances, abductions and forced marriages and conversions of Coptic women.
2. The Coptic Community will educate families and young women on the recruitment and deception patterns that lead to captivity.

*International Community*

1. A legal defense fund will be created to enable Coptic families to secure the presence of an attorney.
2. International or national agencies assessing the situation of Coptic women in Egypt will recognize that coercion and fraud are represented in most cases of disappearance, forced marriages and forced conversions, all of which obviate the consent of the victim.
3. International organizations will recognize both the scope and scale of the problem and no longer refer to such offenses as mere "allegations."

Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission, I thank you for your time and interest in this very important matter. I look forward to answering your questions.

## “TELL MY MOTHER THAT I MISS HER”

## THE DISAPPEARANCE, FORCED MARRIAGES AND FORCED CONVERSIONS OF COPTIC CHRISTIAN WOMEN IN EGYPT (II)

JULY 2012

A Report Commissioned by Christian Solidarity International, Written by Michele Clark and Nadia Ghaly

[The title is a direct quote from a young Coptic woman. Her father recorded a telephone conversation in which he was able to talk to her after her abduction.]

## INTRODUCTION

In November 2009, Christian Solidarity International (CSI) and the Coptic Foundation for Human Rights (CFHR) published a pioneering report entitled *The Disappearance, Forced Conversions and Forced Marriages of Coptic Christian Women in Egypt*, co-authored by anti-trafficking expert Michele Clark and Coptic human rights activist Nadia Ghaly.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the report was to stimulate action-oriented discussion within the international human rights community, especially within major anti-trafficking and religious liberty institutions, where the issue had hitherto been a taboo, touching, as it does, a raw religio-political nerve in both the Islamic world and the West.

News of disappearances and forced marriages and conversions began to reach the West in the 1970s. At that time, Egypt's President Anwar Sadat had unleashed forces of Islamism in the hope of strengthening the social and cultural foundations of the Egyptian state, following the failure of the socialist Pan-Arab ideology of his predecessor, Gamal Abdel Nasser. In 1976, two years before Sadat ordered his arrest and internal exile, the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, the late Pope Shenouda III, protested against the abuse of Christian females, reportedly stating: “There is pressure being practiced to convert Coptic girls to Islam and marry them under terror to Muslim husbands.”<sup>2</sup> On March 16, 2004, the Coptic Pope again addressed this issue, indicating that he had received “countless” letters of complaint, and urged the police to investigate cases.<sup>3</sup>

In 1999, a Freedom House report on religious liberty in Egypt, based largely on a fact-finding mission, stated:

There are credible reports from many areas of Egypt that militant Muslims kidnap or manipulate Christian girls into converting. This can even involve girls below the legal age in Egyptian law at which a person can change his or her religion.<sup>4</sup>

The 21st century has seen a dramatic increase in cases reaching Egyptian lawyers and Coptic human rights organizations.

The 2009 Clark and Ghaly report made an impact. The U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report 2010 acknowledged such cases for the first time, stating:

During the reporting period, an international NGO released a report about alleged forced marriages of Coptic females in Egypt, including an allegation of forced prostitution, though the allegations have not been confirmed.<sup>5</sup>

The Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report also spoke to the issue for the first time in 2010, stating:

As in previous years, there were occasional claims of Muslim men forcing Coptic women and girls to convert to Islam. Reports of such cases were disputed and often included inflammatory allegation and categorical denials of kidnapping and rape. In November 2009 an international Christian advocacy group published a report regarding alleged cases of forced conversion; however, well-respected local human rights groups were unable to verify such cases and found

<sup>1</sup> Michele Clark & Nadia Ghaly, *The Disappearance, Forced Conversions and Forced Marriages of Coptic Christian Women in Egypt*, Christian Solidarity International and Coptic Foundation for Human Rights, November 1999. [http://www.csi-int.org/pdfs/csi\\_coptic\\_report.pdf](http://www.csi-int.org/pdfs/csi_coptic_report.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Mary Abdelmassih, “Family of Abducted Christian Coptic Teenager Assaulted by Muslim Mob,” AINA, Cairo, June 9, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> “Coptic Pope Denounces Forced Conversion of Coptic Girls,” US Copts Association, March 25, 2004, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/OrthodoxNews/message/671>. Cornelius Hulsmann, “Blowing Up Rumors on Forced Conversions of Coptic Girls,” Arab-West Report, July 26, 2008, [www.arabwestreport.info/year-2004/week-12/17-blowing-rumors-forced-conversions-coptic-girls](http://www.arabwestreport.info/year-2004/week-12/17-blowing-rumors-forced-conversions-coptic-girls).

<sup>4</sup> *Egypt's Endangered Christians*, A Report by the Center for Religious Freedom of Freedom House, 1999, p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report 2010, “Egypt.” <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2010/142759.htm>

it extremely difficult to determine whether compulsion was used, as most cases involved a female Copt who converted to Islam when she married a male Muslim. Reports of such cases almost never appear in the local media.<sup>6</sup>

The State Department's assertion that cases remain unverified, without providing evidence of an attempt to verify, appeared to be calculated to put a particularly sensitive political issue to rest, without regard for the well-being of the female victims. Therefore, CSI commissioned Ms. Clark and Ms. Ghaly to undertake a second fact-finding visit to Egypt in November 2011.

All the cases in their new report, entitled *Tell My Mother I Miss Her*, are based on interviews conducted by the co-authors with victims, families members, church workers and to attorneys. All the cases have been reported to Egyptian authorities. Most are on-going cases in the Egyptian courts and, as such, all evidence a matter of record. Each case is documented and authentic. However, in order to protect the identity of victims and their families, all identifying information has been removed given that this report is intended for broad dissemination.

*Tell My Mother I Miss Her* should be read in conjunction with the co-author's 2009 report.

CSI's aim in publishing their latest finding remains constant. It is to:

challenge human rights activists and institutions, especially those whose mandate includes women's rights and trafficking in persons, to undertake, as a matter of urgency, further research into this form of gender and religious based violence against Coptic women and girls in Egypt.<sup>7</sup>

The events of the so-called "Arab Spring" swept Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak out of power, but they have scarcely begun to address the deep-seated Muslim and male supremacism that permeates large swathes of Egyptian society and provides the cultural context of the forcible marriages and conversions. This twin-headed cultural hydra of contempt for women and for non-Muslims was on display during demonstrations at Tahrir Square when the western journalists Laura Logan (ABC News) and Caroline Sinz (France 3) were brutally sexually assaulted by mobs of men. In the case of Ms. Logan, the assailants accused her—incorrectly—of being a Jew.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that Ms. Logan is American and Ms. Sinz is French guaranteed major media coverage and international condemnation. But Egyptian female victims, especially non-Muslims, do not command such media attention nor the sympathies of western policy-makers. The sexual abuse and servitude of non-Muslim women in Egypt tends to elicit ritual denials and obfuscations that are reminiscent of the customary public reaction to such abuse of non-white women in America during the days of racial segregation.

In his historic message to the Muslim world, delivered from Cairo in June 2009, President Barack Obama stated:

I am convinced that in order to move forward, we must say openly things we hold in our hearts, and that too often are said only behind closed doors.<sup>9</sup>

CSI intends to continue researching this issue and to speak openly about it. We will also continue to encourage governmental and non-government human rights institutions to do likewise, with or without legitimization from governmental institutions. Denial and obfuscation will neither help victimized Christian women, nor challenge the religious bigotry and sexism that impedes the development of democracy in Egypt.

John Eibner  
CEO, Christian Solidarity International (CSI—USA)

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Coptic women in Egypt are disappearing from their homes, their schools, and their places of work. They go missing while returning from church, picking up their children from school, or traveling to the sick bed of an aging parent. They are often held as captives, subjected to physical and psychological abuse in the form of rapes,

<sup>6</sup>U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2010, "Egypt", p. 26, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/171733.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup>Clark & Ghaly, p. 1. [http://www.csi-int.org/pdfs/csi\\_coptic\\_report.pdf](http://www.csi-int.org/pdfs/csi_coptic_report.pdf).

<sup>8</sup>"Lara Logan Breaks Silence on Cairo Assault," CBS 60 Minutes, April 28, 2011, [http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-18560\\_162\\_20058368.html?pageNum=2&tag=contentMain;contentBody](http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-18560_162_20058368.html?pageNum=2&tag=contentMain;contentBody).

"Journalists Sexually Assaulted Covering Egypt Unrest," AFP, November 24, 2011. <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5h9r5Rf6FcTkoamQrBv-QN86b42Wg>.

<sup>9</sup>"Remarks by the President on a New Beginning," Cairo, June 4, 2009. [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09/).

beatings, domestic labor without pay, forced marriage and forced conversion to Islam. Their lives, and the lives of their families, are severely damaged.

The Egyptian government and the international community have distanced themselves from any sense of urgency or malfeasance. Detractors claim that disappearances are nothing more than petulant acts of young women seeking to leave oppressive home environments and that there is no criminal activity involved. Claims of abductions, the detractors insist, are rather intended to deflect attention from the real causes of a young woman's behavior, stemming from feeling trapped in an extremely conservative religious and social tradition, or desiring a life with more material benefits as well as educational and personal opportunities.

To address this issue, Christian Solidarity International and the Coptic Foundation for Human Rights commissioned a report written in November 2009 entitled "The Disappearance, Forced Conversions and Forced Marriages of Coptic Christian Women in Egypt." The report conclusively stated that Coptic girls and women are deceptively lured into forced marriages with Muslim men and conversions to Islam; that the criminality of such activities is generally dismissed by the Egyptian authorities; that young women are presumed to be willing participants in such marriages and conversions; that the disappearances follow consistent patterns; that counseling sessions with members of their own clergy were no longer available to potential converts to Islam; that the Egyptian government does not restore the Christian identity of Coptic women who have returned to their communities of origin; that Coptic women are particularly vulnerable to deception and fraudulent practices; and that, while the Coptic Church does provide safe houses and shelters for some women, it is difficult for many to return to normal lives.

Since the publication of the first report, the U.S. Department of State's Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor has devoted more attention to the phenomenon, but without confirming it as human trafficking. Meanwhile, the Coptic community has become more vulnerable to persecution on account of the upsurge of militant Islam following the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak. Emigration is increasing and asylum petitions in both the United States and other countries are on the rise. Young Coptic women are particularly vulnerable. Exploitation often thrives during times of political unrest and internal chaos, where traditional law enforcement measures, however insufficient, are usually overtaxed and limited in scope. Lawyers, social workers and civil society activists report that they are seeing more disappearances. Four attorneys collectively report a total of over 550 cases for the restoration of Christian identity following disappearances, forced marriages and forced conversions over a five-year period, with cases escalating since January 25, 2011. Furthermore, one attorney interviewed for this report indicates first-hand knowledge of over 1,600 cases of Christians who had converted to Islam in recent years, and who are now petitioning to have their Christian identities restored. Of this number, 60% are women.

Claims that all disappearances are the result of petulant behavior and not abduction reflect a misunderstanding of the relationships between the young women and their captors rather than an accurate analysis of the circumstances. This challenge has been repeatedly addressed, and not always successfully, in anti-trafficking discourse.

The goal of this second report is straightforward: to challenge the notion that the testimony of victims is made up of mere allegations and to encourage the Government of Egypt and the international community to address the issue openly and responsibly.

The authors of this report recognize that not all disappearances result from abductions, that not all marriages are forced and some conversions can be consensual. The authors spoke with a young woman who quite candidly admitted that she left her husband because he beat her while her male Muslim neighbor was kind. She eventually returned to her family.

Notwithstanding the ambiguity of many situations, the authors maintain it is not possible to dismiss each documented case in the 2009 report on the grounds that girls willingly and without being misled left their families.

This new report substantiates and confirms the findings of the 2009 publication. In addition, the authors have observed changes in trends and patterns, all of which continue to reinforce the pre-meditation of the captors. Only verifiable cases are included in this report. Each of these cases is verifiable through attorney files, personal interviews and police reports. *The names of young women and their family members and other identifying details are not published in this report in order to protect their identities.*

The Key Findings of the 2012 Report Are:

- The numbers of disappearances and abductions are increasing.

- Fewer girls are returning to their families.
- Social media is increasingly used to communicate a victim's status.
- Minors and mothers of young children are increasingly targeted.
- Abductions continue to be organized and planned.
- Captors target women and girls when they are unprotected and vulnerable.
- Captors sever ties between victims and their families.
- Captors make use of measures involving force, fraud and coercion.

Recommendations:

This report builds on the recommendations of the earlier publication in seeking to guarantee the protection of minors, secure the cooperation of law enforcement in investigating and prosecuting reports of abductions and disappearances, and expedite reconversions to Christianity in instances of abductions.

*THE DISAPPEARANCE OF COPTIC WOMEN IN EGYPT*

For over thirty years, reports of Coptic women being kidnapped, forcibly converted and married to Muslim men have been emerging from Egypt. What began as an issue supported by anecdotal evidence and kept alive by concerned family members, clergy and a few brave human rights attorneys and activists has not abated. Instead, it continues to surface, strengthened by growing numbers of verifiable cases. The disappearances, forced marriages and conversions of young Coptic women are now addressed by western governments and some media outlets. On October 27, 2011 the European Parliament issued a statement condemning the violence directed against the Copts in Egypt, and in particular, expressing concern "about the kidnapping of Coptic girls who have been forced to convert to Islam."<sup>1</sup> On December 15, 2010, the BBC aired a documentary entitled "Christian minority under pressure in Egypt."<sup>2</sup> In the opening scene, a father relates to the interviewer that there will be no Christmas tree in their home this year; their daughter, who loved Christmas, was abducted and has never returned, and the presence of a tree would be too painful. On June 15, 2011, the US Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission) convened three experts (including one author of this report) to testify at a hearing on the status of Egypt's Coptic Christians, with a focus on the abductions of young Coptic women.<sup>3</sup> And finally, Yasmin El Rashdi, writing in the *New York Review of Books* on June 15, 2011, quotes a parish priest who raises the issue of the disappearance of young Coptic women.

"There are no sizable attacks," he said, "but each week there are incidents of women having the cross grabbed from their necks as they walk in the streets. In this very neighborhood people are still being insulted as they leave church; and we still have young girls disappearing, kidnapped, being harassed for what they are wearing or for bearing the cross tattooed on their wrists."<sup>4</sup>

Certainly, the climate is precarious for Egypt's 10 million-plus Copts. During the uprising that led to the resignation of President Mubarak, some Copts and Muslims stood arm in arm in Tahrir Square in Cairo, united in their efforts to end dictatorship. Today, Mubarak is gone. But the Copts have not fared well by his departure. Indeed, they are facing increasing persecution. The recent massacre at Maspero, in Cairo, where Egyptian armed forces attacked Christians engaged in a peaceful demonstration, augurs little favor for the future of Egypt's Coptic population. According to Nina Shea, international religious freedom expert:

"The real significance of this is that it signals the failure of the Christian Coptic Community by the State. The military was their last hope in protecting them from lawless forces in society that were religiously motivated to [eradicate] them, namely the Salafis. Now they know they have no protection. [Furthermore] I think we can expect to see a major exodus of Coptic Christians from Egypt. This is a watershed moment. The whole reason they were in the streets

<sup>1</sup> European Parliament News. Accessed at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/pressroom/content/20111027IPR30446/html/Parliament-stands-up-for-Christians-in-Egypt-and-Syria>

<sup>2</sup> The documentary can be seen at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12014779>

<sup>3</sup> Full Transcript of the hearing is available at: <http://csce.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=ContentRecords.ViewTranscript&ContentRecordId=504&ContentType=H,B&ContentRecordType=H&CFID=59942414&CFTOKEN=34987951>

<sup>4</sup> El Rashdi, Yasmin. *The Victorious Islamists*. *New York Review of Books*. June 15, 2011. Accessed at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/jul/14/egypt-victorious-islamists/?page=1>

was to protest lawless forces. It extinguishes all hope for them. They are utterly vulnerable.”<sup>5</sup>

Almost as if on cue, two months later the Wall Street Journal reported that, since the events of January 2011, asylum applications into the US from Egyptian Copts have doubled.<sup>6</sup>

Among the most vulnerable members of this beleaguered community are women and young girls. Young Coptic women are applying for asylum on the basis of fear of being abducted and forced to convert and marry. In September 2011, Michele Clark, one of the authors of this report, testified in federal court as an expert witness in one such asylum case. Asylum was granted for a young Coptic woman on the basis of fear of being abducted should she return. Other immigration lawyers attest to recent favorable asylum decisions based on threat or fear of abduction.<sup>7</sup>

#### THE 2009 REPORT

“The Disappearance, Forced Conversions and Forced Marriages of Coptic Christian Women in Egypt,” published in November 2009 by Christian Solidarity International and the Coptic Foundation for Human Rights and written by Michele Clark and Nadia Ghaly, documented disappearances, forced conversions and marriages among Egypt’s Coptic minority. This report credibly positioned the plight of Coptic women as a challenge for the international community.

The report was based on first-person interviews with young women who had been held against their will by Muslim captors, forced to convert and marry their captors and who, in some cases, were able to return to their families. Other sources of information included conversations with parish priests, monks and nuns at a monastery that provides shelter to women returning from abduction, and human rights attorneys who represent many of these young women as they attempt to regain their Christian identities. Police reports, attorney files and church/clergy records support each case.

The main findings of the report were:

1. Coptic women and girls are deceptively lured into forced marriages with Muslim men and conversions to Islam. This conclusion was reached through personal interviews with young women who had returned from such situations, parish priests, the head of a monastery providing shelter to over 50 women, and an examination of court cases filed by human rights attorneys.
2. Egyptian authorities dismiss the criminality of such marriages and conversions. Young women are presumed to be willing participants in the marriages and conversions. However, these arguments do not take into consideration the role of coercion in obtaining consent to marriage or conversion. Women testify to fraudulent claims, the use of force, threats and physical abuse, including rape and the forced removal of Coptic tattoos. There were no reported cases of prosecution among all reported cases. Islam allows a Muslim man to marry a Christian woman without a conversion, so there is no apparent religious need for these conversions.
3. The disappearances of Coptic women and girls follow consistent patterns that include deception, fraud and force. Testimonies from returning women as well as family members and attorneys indicate that means of enticement into a fraudulent relationship followed specific patterns and involved the use of women and men to build relationships of trust and dispel resistance.
4. Religious counseling sessions with members of a person’s own clergy prior to conversion to Islam are no longer required. Such sessions were halted by the government in 2008 and have not been reinstated.
5. Coptic women face physical and psychological abuse before and after their forced conversions and marriages. Abuse includes beatings, isolation from family members, and restrictions on personal freedom. Cases of ensnarement, rape and physical abuse are rarely filed in court.
6. The Egyptian Government does not restore the religious identities of women who return to their communities and families. As a consequence, these women are unable to marry within their own communities and in many instances remain marginalized.

<sup>5</sup>Joan Frawley Desmond. “Watershed Moment: Copts Killed in Violence: Nina Shea predicts a ‘major exodus’ of Christians after deadly violence in Cairo.” National Catholic Register. October 10, 2011. Accessed at [http://www.ncregister.com/site/print\\_article/30767/](http://www.ncregister.com/site/print_article/30767/)

<sup>6</sup>“Egypt’s Embattled Christians See Room in America” by Lucette Lagnado. The Wall Street Journal. Saturday, December 24, 2011.

<sup>7</sup>Conversation with Caroline Doss, January 12, 2012. Ms. Doss, together with Ms. Clark and Mr. Jean Maher, testified before a US Helsinki Commission Hearing: “Minority at Risk: Coptic Christians in Egypt” - July 22, 2011



7. Coptic women and girls are vulnerable to deception and fraudulent practices because of difficult home environments, economic pressures and sheltered lives.
8. The Coptic Church has developed some safe houses for victimized women and girls. These centers, usually established in monasteries, provide shelter and housing for young women returning from a forced marriage and conversion.

The Report also included recommendations for the Egyptian government, the Coptic Church and the international community. In particular, the report recommended that the Egyptian government

1. Reinstate counseling sessions for those contemplating conversion to Islam.
2. Expedite the restoration of Christian identity cards and legal Christian status to young women forcibly converted to Islam.
3. Investigate and prosecute all reports and allegations of disappearances, abductions, rape and other acts of violence against Coptic women.

#### *LEGAL UPDATE*

In July 2011, Egypt's Supreme Administrative Court ruled that Christian converts to Islam could reconvert and be identified as Christians on their national identity cards and birth certificates. However, lawyers representing many Copts, the largest population affected by this decision, argue that similar decisions in the past have not been implemented and remain skeptical as to the potential for any real change. In fact, restoration of Christian identity cards has remained the exception. Lawyers document a double standard regarding conversions in Egypt. When a Christian converts to Islam, documents are processed with remarkable speed. In the case of conversions from Islam to Christianity, these lawyers report a process rife with red tape and obstructionism. This process also affects the children of Christian converts to Islam, who are automatically registered as Muslims when they reach the age of 16 regardless of whether or not their parents became reconverts to Christianity.<sup>8</sup>

#### *NEW CHALLENGES*

Notwithstanding a growing body of evidence to substantiate allegations of deceptive and coercive practices regarding young Coptic women, the issue remains controversial, both in Egypt and abroad. Cases are normally publicized by the Coptic activist who most fervently reject the discriminatory conventions of dhimmitude,<sup>9</sup> and who dare to cross the red lines drawn by Egypt's Islamic political and religious establishment. For these activists, the disappearance, forced marriage and forced conversion of Coptic women and girls is a tangible sign of the persecution to which Egypt's Christian community is subjected. One of the most prominent Coptic campaigners on behalf of these female victims is the journalist and human rights activist Magdy Khalil of the Middle East Freedom Forum. According to Khalil:

Abducting and converting Coptic girls to Islam is not only a result of the paranoid and racist incitation against the Copts, but it is an organized and pre-planned process by associations and organizations inside Egypt with domestic and Arab funding as the main role in seducing and luring Coptic girls is carried through cunning, deceit and enticement or through force if required.

As for the role of the Egyptian state, Khalil explains:

The government does not meet to plan how to abduct Coptic girls, but it is a conniver and a collaborate partner that contributed in creating this environment. As for the actual planning, it is carried out by individuals, groups, associations, as well as Egyptian and regional organizations. What the government plans for and implements is the lateralization of the Copts within the Egyptian society.<sup>10</sup>

Since the overthrow of President Mubarak, Coptic activists and families of missing girls have taken advantage of the broader space given to civil society by forming the Association of Victims of Abduction and Enforced Disappearance. On the 29th of February, 2012, they staged a public demonstration before the Egyptian par-

<sup>8</sup>“Court Allows Christian reconverts to state religion on ID cards.” By Heba Fahmy. Daily News Egypt. July 4, 2011. Accessed at <http://www.thedailynewsegyp.com/religion/court-allows-christian-reconverts-to-state-religion-on-id-cards-dp3.html>

<sup>9</sup>Dhimmitude is the collective condition of dhimmi communities. Dhimmis are Christians, Jews and certain other non-Muslims whose communities have accepted—usually under duress—Muslim political and social supremacy according to the norms established by discriminatory Shariah law. See Bat Ye’or, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam*, Farleigh Dickenson University Press, 1985.

<sup>10</sup>“Who is responsible for abducting Coptic Girls?” Jihad Watch, August 26, 2005. <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2005/08/magdy-khalil-who-is-responsible-for-abducting-coptic-girls.html>.

liament, chanting: “Where is the rule of law,” “No for the Islamization of minors,” and “MPs, where are the rights of Copts?”<sup>11</sup>

The Copts, whose reflexes remain strongly conditioned by the age-old violence and discrimination that are inherent in the conventions of dhimmitude are the most inclined to the respect the rules laid down by Egypt’s Islamic authorities, and to downplay and depoliticize the plight of missing Coptic women and girls. Dr. Sherif Doss, a prominent physician and politician, is one Coptic leader who prefers not to highlight the issue. He explains that the victims are limited to young females who “are not educated and have not learned to make wise decisions in life.”<sup>12</sup> Other Copts emphasize that repressive home environments, arranged marriages and strict prohibitions against divorce drive young Christian women into romantic relationships with Muslim men, which appear to offer freedom from a troubled past.<sup>13</sup> These scenarios, they claim, imply consent and cast doubt on the use of force. Blaming the victim in rape and trafficking cases is a widespread cultural reflex in male-dominated societies where pinning blame on perpetrators runs the risk of serious consequences.

One of the most vocal proponents of a dhimmitude-conditioned response, Cornelis Hulsman, is not a native Egyptian, but is a Cairo-based Dutch sociologist and the publisher of Arab-West Report. He has established the Centers for Intercultural Dialogue and Translation and the Center for Arab-West Understanding, and through these instruments is active player in the foreign relations of the Egyptian state and church.<sup>14</sup> Hulsman’s Arab-West consortium has long campaigned against Copts who accuse Muslim men of using force to kidnap, marry and convert Coptic women and girls. “[Such] stories”, Hulsman wrote in 2007,

often reflect pre-existing deep anti-Muslim sentiments and reinforce such sentiments. Most stories of Muslims forcing Christian girls to convert to Islam fit this category. Such stories create a boomerang effect, angry responses from Muslims that could easily reflect on their relations with other Christians who had nothing to do with this type of reporting.<sup>15</sup>

Hulsman’s coverage is animated by a declared commitment to combat reports that “make the public believe Muslims target Christians, creating Christian self-pity and Muslim anger by using rumors, uninvestigated allegations, and [by] neglecting social, cultural and historical contexts.”<sup>16</sup> Arab-West Report claims to have “investigated around 200 of claims of forced conversion of Christian girls in Egypt and found not a single one of them to involve kidnap, i.e. the use of physical force to get young Coptic girls to convert to Islam.”<sup>17</sup> But details of only seven cases are provided in what Hulsman calls his “most comprehensive” report on the issue.<sup>18</sup>

The responses conditioned by dhimmitude strikes a chord with the Western powers. Since 1995, the European Union has been pursuing the convergence of Islamic North Africa and the Middle East with post-Christian, secular Europe through the Barcelona Process.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, following 9/11, President George W. Bush, established winning the hearts and minds of Muslims as a major American foreign policy

<sup>11</sup> Mohamed Abdel Salam & Joseph Mayton, “Egypt’s Copts protest ‘disappearance’ of girls”, *Bikya Masr*, February 29, 2012, <http://bikyamasr.com/59521/egypts-copts-protest-disappearance-of-girls/>

<sup>12</sup> Personal interviews with the authors. Cairo, Egypt. November 18, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Mayton, “Missing Coptic Women May Send Distress Signals.” *WeNews*, February 1, 2007. <http://www.womensenews.org/story/the-world/070201/missing-coptic-women-may-send-distress-signals>.

<sup>14</sup> According to Hulsman, his Center for Arab-West Understanding obtained legal recognition as a Non-Governmental Organization through the backing of powerful representatives of the Mubarak regime, among them: the late Grand Sheikh of Al Ahzar Muhammad Sayyed Tantawi, Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Minister of Islamic Endowments, Mahmud Hamdi Zaquq, and Arab League Secretary-General Amir Musa. [http://www.cawu.org/?About\\_Us](http://www.cawu.org/?About_Us)

<sup>15</sup> Cornelis Hulsman & Sawsan Gabra Ayoub Khalil, “To Be an Effective Advocate for Peace, Media Distortions Must Be Addressed,” *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*, no. 8, June 2007, p. 81. [http://www.iemed.org/publicacions/quaderns/8/q8\\_081.pdf](http://www.iemed.org/publicacions/quaderns/8/q8_081.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Cornelis Hulsman & Sawsan Gabra Ayoub Khalil, “To Be an Effective Advocate for Peace, Media Distortions Must Be Addressed,” *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*, no. 8, June 2007, p. 81. [http://www.iemed.org/publicacions/quaderns/8/q8\\_081.pdf](http://www.iemed.org/publicacions/quaderns/8/q8_081.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.arabwestreport.info/8-christian-solidarity-international-claiming-forced-conversion-coptic-girls-islam>

<sup>18</sup> “Forced Conversions or not?” New York Council of Churches, June 28, 1999 (RNSAW 1999, 26A, art. 37), the report “Conversions of Christians to Islam,” by Dr. Rodolph Yanney, January 9, 2001 (RNSAW 2001, 01A, art. 4) and the “Open letter to former US Congressman Pastor Ed McNeely” (AWR 2003, 30, art. 34). Also see AWR 2004, 28, arts. 21–22, 37–38, and AWR 2004, 36, art. 28 for the case of Inji Edward Naji.

<sup>19</sup> “The Barcelona Process”, European Union External Action. [http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/barcelona\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/barcelona_en.htm)

objective.<sup>20</sup> In this context, the US Department of State, fearing the anger of Muslim military allies, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, downplays and depoliticizes the issue, as Hulsman does.

The US Department of State's 2010 Trafficking in Persons Report referenced the 2009 CSI report, claiming, "During the reporting period, an international NGO released a report about alleged forced marriages of Coptic Christian females in Egypt, including an allegation of forced prostitution, though the allegations have not been confirmed."<sup>21</sup>

The US Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report for 2010 also referenced this same report:

"As in previous years, there were occasional claims of Muslim men forcing Coptic women and girls to convert to Islam. Reports of such cases were disputed and often included inflammatory allegations and categorical denials of kidnapping and rape. In November 2009 an international Christian advocacy group published a report regarding alleged cases of forced conversion; however, well-respected local human rights groups were unable to verify such cases and found it extremely difficult to determine whether compulsion was used, as most cases involved a female Copt who converted to Islam when she married a male Muslim. Reports of such cases almost never appear in the local media."<sup>22</sup>

The authors of the 2009 report recognize that not all disappearances result from abductions, that not all marriages are forced and that some conversions can be consensual. The authors spoke with a young woman who quite candidly admitted that she left her husband because he beat her while her male Muslim neighbor was kind. She eventually returned to her family.

However, **it is not possible to dismiss each documented case in the 2009 report on these grounds.** Over the past six years, the authors have observed remarkable consistency in the stories of young women and their families from different parts of the country and from different social backgrounds, a consistency that supports the reliability of their testimonies. Respected and well-known human rights attorneys represent the majority of women whose stories are told in these reports. They have court documents and sworn affidavits attesting to the veracity of their clients.

Claims that all disappearances are the result of petulant behavior and not abduction reflect a misunderstanding of the relationships between the young women and their captors rather than an accurate analysis of the circumstances. This challenge has been repeatedly addressed, and not always successfully, in anti-trafficking discourse.

In critiquing the 2009 report, the International Religious Freedom Report claims that it is "difficult to determine whether compulsion was used, as most cases involved a female Copt who converted to Islam when she married a male Muslim." This statement assumes that all marriages are voluntary and denies a recognized human rights violation, which is that marriages can be forced and that force obviates consent. A recent European Union Policy Directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims states in paragraph (11) of its introduction:

The definition [of trafficking in human beings] also covers...other behaviour such as illegal adoption or forced marriage in so far as they fulfill the constitutive elements of trafficking in human beings.<sup>23</sup>

Given that the authors of this report have verified that force, fraud and coercion are present in our documented cases, the fact that such trafficking cases are linked to marriage does not obviate the offense, as claimed by the US Department of State above.

This report will focus upon various forms of vulnerability and coercion and their relevance in these instances in order to make a clear case for the reality of the abuse and exploitation of Egyptian Coptic women.

#### A NEW REPORT

In November 2011, Ms. Ghaly and Ms. Clark traveled to Egypt in order to gather information for a second report. The purpose of this new study is to acquire further evidence to support the claims of disappearances, abductions and forced conversions

<sup>20</sup>"Winning the hearts and minds' of Arab and Muslim populations has quite understandably risen to the top of the Bush administration's agenda." David Hoffman, "Beyond Public Diplomacy," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2002, pp. 83-95.

<sup>21</sup><http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/57813/david-hoffman/beyond-public-diplomacy>.

<sup>22</sup> Accessed at <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2010/142759.htm>

<sup>23</sup>The European Union Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA

and forced marriages of Coptic women in Egypt and to challenge the use of the term “allegation” in US Government reports.

The new findings in the report are based on:

1. Interviews with four Egyptian lawyers. These lawyers provided access to claims filed by families on behalf of Coptic women who had disappeared as well as young women who had returned from a forced marriage and conversion and were attempting to regain their Christian identities;
2. Interviews with representatives of civil society organizations;
3. Interviews with family members of young women who have disappeared. Some of these individuals are represented by attorneys;
4. A review of Internet sites reporting the disappearance of Coptic girls. The authors considered only those cases with appropriate documentation, including police reports.
5. Interviews with women who have returned from a forced marriage and conversion.

All interviews were conducted from November 16–25, 2011, in Cairo, Egypt, by the authors of this report.

Only verifiable cases are included in this report. Each of these cases is verifiable through attorney files, personal interviews and police reports. *The real names of young women and their family members and other identifying details are not published in this report in order to protect their identities.*

#### AN INCREASING CHALLENGE

This report corroborates all the findings and conclusions of the 2009 report. Additionally, the report provides insight into new aspects of the disappearances, abductions, and forced marriages and conversions of Coptic women and girls.

The Number of Disappearances and Abductions Appear To Be Increasing.

As in the anti-trafficking arena, exact numbers of cases throughout the country are difficult to come by for reasons analyzed below. However, each of the attorneys interviewed for this report indicated an increase in his caseload since January 2011. Four attorneys collectively report a total of over 550 cases of abductions, disappearances and petitions to restore Christian identity following abductions, forced marriages and forced conversions over a five-year period. Furthermore, one attorney interviewed for this report indicates first-hand knowledge of over 1,600 cases of Christians petitioning to have their conversions to Islam overturned in recent years, with 60% of this number being women; in other words, 960 women are petitioning to have their Christian identities restored.

J. was 18 years old when she was abducted on her way home from school. Her abductor was a man who had worked for her father and had begun to make advances towards her. According to a police report, the man is an escapee from prison, and had threatened J. ten days prior to the actual abduction. The threat was reported to the police on May 20. Two days later, she was drugged, raped and taken to Alexandria where she and her abductor were married. She was returned to her family on June 1. Legally, she is still married to a Muslim man and her identity card indicates that she is a Muslim.

The issue of the disappearance of Coptic women is coming out from the shadows as evidenced by the emergence of websites managed by Coptic activists documenting claims of disappearances and abductions. Increasingly, families learn about the status of a missing wife or daughter via websites which announce new conversions to Islam.<sup>24</sup>

#### Data Collection Challenges

There is no systematic data repository within the Coptic community documenting the disappearances of young women. Priests or bishops keep records of activities within their churches and communities. Attorneys maintain their own caseloads. Activists maintain different websites but there is no cross-referencing with other data sources.

Families of victims do not report all cases. The police do not register all complaints filed by family members. In many cases, family members of missing young women reported that the police would not file a report until a lawyer intervened. In other cases, families do not file reports because they do not believe that their claims will be taken seriously or because they fear retribution by the authorities. Not all families are financially able to secure the services of an attorney; while not

<sup>24</sup>An example of such a website can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWVjchpIDA4>

a guarantee of results, the presence of an attorney would at least enable the filing of a legitimate claim.

George is a quiet, soft-spoken man. His daughter, H., disappeared on August 28, 2011. "I received a phone call telling me to watch out for my daughter," he told us. He took his phone to the local police to report the threat but the police did nothing. He tried repeatedly to call back the number, sending numerous text messages as well.

After that, he kept H. at home all day. For almost two weeks, he remained at home, until finally he had to return to work. When he came back home, his daughter was gone. She had wanted to go to the supermarket, 250 meters from their home, and her mother had let her.

George looked everywhere for his daughter. He reported the disappearance to the police, who sent him from one station to the other before he was able to file a report. Although he was able to find out the name of the owner of the cell phone on which he received the phone call, he reports that the police did nothing. He has not heard a word from his daughter since her disappearance. When asked, George replied that he has learned of at least four similar cases of daughters who have gone missing without any further communication to their families in his own neighborhood. These cases have never been registered with the police. Nor has George sought the help of a lawyer.

It is not only the local police who are reluctant to take these cases seriously. In September of 2011, human rights attorney Stefanos Milad Stefanos took fourteen open cases of abduction to the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior to request investigations. He reports that there has been no follow up to his report. The authors of this report met with one father whose case was taken to the Attorney General.

D. was 19 when she disappeared on May 20th, 2011. She went to work as a computer technician and never came home. Her mother reported her missing at 6:00 pm that evening. At 11:00 pm, the police came to their home and told the family that she had married a Muslim man. The family reluctantly accepted the fact that their daughter had gone of her own accord.

D. called her father, an army officer, on June 20. As soon as the father realized that it was his daughter, he pushed the "Record" button on his cell phone. Through sobs, his daughter apologizes to her father and asks him to tell her mother that she misses her. Her cries are interrupted by the sounds of someone entering the room. The line goes dead. When K, the father, calls back, a man answers the phone and says, "*She is unconscious now but let me tell you something, this girl is more important to me than anything else. I swear to God, if something happens to her, I will kill all of you and I will burn the church. You know that I can do that!*"<sup>25</sup>

In this case, Stefanos presented the Attorney General with three requests: The first, to address the threats to the father and the church; the second, to allow the father to meet with his daughter; and finally, to allow his daughter to tell the story of what had happened to her. If she in fact did marry her husband according to her own free will, there would be no more charges.

D. has called her father now eight times, asking for help in getting away. She says that she is abused and mistreated. She is imprisoned in a room and occasionally has access to a phone. Her father knows where she is, but is afraid to intervene because the consequences might be worse. Out of desperation, he told his daughter to cut herself so that her family would take her to the hospital. There, he might get a chance to see her. Unfortunately for him, the family had the doctor brought to the house in order to treat D.

At the time of our meetings, there had been no response from the office of the Attorney General to any of the cases brought by Mr. Stefanos.

Finally, it is important to note that in Egypt, the problem of violence against women in general and the lack of reliable information on such offenses is a documented challenge. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, for example, "regrets the lack of data and information on the incidence of various forms of violence against women and girls [in Egypt], as well as the lack of studies and surveys on the extent of violence and its root causes."<sup>26</sup> In a climate hostile to the reporting of crimes related to sexual assault and domestic violence, members of minority groups are hesitant to come forward.

Fewer Girls Appear To Be Returning to Their Families

<sup>25</sup> Partial Transcription from recorded telephone conversation between D.'s father and abductor.

<sup>26</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Egypt. CEDAW/C/EGY/C0/7. Forty-fifth session. 5 February 2010. Paragraph (23)

Our 2009 report focused on young women who had returned from a forced marriage and conversion and were struggling to regain their Christian identities. Since then, there has been a discernible change in the dynamics of the disappearances of young Coptic women. Attorneys handling such cases report that fewer young women are being returned to their families. There is speculation that young women might be trafficked overseas, but attorneys and activists have not yet been able to document this phenomenon.

A growing number of grief-stricken parents now report that, following the disappearance of a daughter, there is neither contact from her captor nor any communication from the daughter herself.

Z. owns his own business in Cairo. He works hard, and his family is well-off. His wife passed away several years ago and his daughter, A., took care of the family. On April 8, 2011, she went to her private tutoring lessons and never returned home. Z. received a call from a Muslim girl who told him that A. was not feeling well and would not be coming home right away. At that time, A. was 16 years and 7 months old.

When she failed to show up for dinner, the father brought together a group of friends and together they began to search for A. After three days, he filed a police report. The police were able to follow the movements of A.'s captors by tracking her cell phone, which was used with a different SIM card belonging to a recognized drug dealer. However, even in possession of this information, the police have done nothing to locate this man, notwithstanding the fact that he has a firm link to a disappeared girl. Concurrently, the father ran multiple missing persons ads in local papers.

The family has heard nothing from A. since her disappearance and there is no trace of her on any of the traditional conversion websites.

S. was 23 years old when she disappeared on February 4, 2011. She comes from a family with modest means and worked in a plastics factory. She was living at home. On February 4, she went to evening church services with her mother. When her mother came out of the church, S. had disappeared. A young child told her that a microbus full of young girls took her daughter.

The family searched throughout the entire neighborhood and in other towns for their daughter, putting up posters in public places. S.'s father tried to report the abduction on February 7 but was told to go to several police stations before one would file a report. Since February, there has been no communication with the family. S.'s brother is despondent. He says that he has three choices: to find his sister, to kill himself, or to hope that death finds him quickly.

#### Social Media

Many families are learning about their daughters' conversion to Islam through new Internet sites which document the conversion to Islam of Christian girls.

Fayqa is tired. She has been looking for her daughter since June of 2010. At that time, her daughter, N., 38, was on her way to Cairo with her children to care for her when she came home from the hospital. N. called from home one evening announcing her arrival time. This was the last time the mother spoke to her daughter.

Fayqa learned that N. had been befriended by a Muslim woman, a neighbor, who also disappeared the same day. She has not been seen since. A woman of some independent means, Fayqa has spent considerable personal resources trying to locate her daughter but has found nothing. Fayqa eventually received a call from a Muslim man giving her a phone number. When she called, another man answered and told her, "I have your daughter. She is with me, and under my care. You will never see her again."

Finally, Fayqa saw a photo of N. on a website for newly converted Muslims, and found a YouTube clip in which N. and her daughter were both announcing their conversions to Islam. Fayqa was puzzled. Her daughter had never used any form of social media in the past. The action was out of character. N.'s daughter, M., is now married to a Muslim student who had been visiting her at the university.

#### Minors And Mothers of Young Children Appear To Be Increasingly Targeted.

In addition to disappearances of single young women over the age of 18, there is a noted increase in the disappearance of minors and of mothers with young children.

Lawyers report an increase in the abductions of mothers with children. While the age of consent to convert is eighteen in Egypt, there are increasing reports that children of mothers who are forced to convert are also registered as Muslims. Even if a mother returns to her community, the children are considered by law to be Muslim and will remain Muslim.

Not all victims come from modest or poor families. H. was married to a wealthy Coptic businessman and had three children who attended a private school. She hired a private car to take them to and from school every morning, accompanying them in the morning and waiting for them in the afternoon, spending her time talking with other young mothers. One, who was subsequently revealed to be the aunt of the driver of the car she hired, was especially engaging and they began buying drinks for each other (bottles of juice or other soft drinks). One morning, after dropping her child off to school, she noted that the driver was going a different direction. She was drinking a bottle of juice, and felt uncomfortable. The driver took her to Al Azhar Mosque. There, she was issued a document claiming that she was a single woman and that she had converted to Islam. Furthermore, the document claimed that her children would automatically become Muslims. Her name was changed. She was persuaded to sign papers divorcing her husband. In her drugged state, she did not have the presence of mind to resist. Eventually she was able to escape and seek refuge with her cousin.

H. is now living with her cousin, whose family is subject to threats as a result of her presence in their household. Her husband will not allow her to see her children and they remain hidden; the father protects them because he fears that they will be taken away and sent to an Islamic center since they are legally considered to be Muslims. She feels trapped: She cannot see her children, her marriage is ended, and she continues to have a Muslim ID card. Detractors claim that she was having an affair with her driver and that the situation escalated beyond her control. Asked about this charge, she looks up at the interviewers and with contempt in her voice claims, "I had a wonderful life. If I was going to risk losing my marriage, it would not have been with a cab driver."

#### *CHARACTERISTICS OF DISAPPEARANCES*

##### *Disappearances Are Organized and Planned.*

Attorneys, social workers and members of the clergy interviewed for this and the previous report all attest to organized and systematic planning in cases of missing Coptic women. Tactics to lure young women into relationships follow similar patterns throughout the country. One lawyer interviewed for this report stated that the same man's name occurred in several police reports; he married five Christian women who subsequently converted to Islam. Family members report that their daughters or sisters were befriended by a schoolmate, a neighbor, or an older mother figure over time. Lawyers indicate that their clients report that the families of the captors benefitted materially; frequently, family members were provided with new apartments or furniture, and unemployable young men were given jobs.

H. the wife of a wealthy Coptic businessman, dropped her children off at school every morning and waited for them in the afternoon. She became friends with a Muslim woman and they developed a habit of treating each other to cool soft drinks. One day H., was given juice that contained a sedative of some sort. She was then abducted.

J. was drugged by a man who worked for her father and with whom she had become friendly.

A. was married to an abusive husband. Y., a Muslim farmer and neighbor, offered to help her.

M.'s mother was abducted. Some time later, M., a university student, was befriended by a Muslim student. Gradually she dropped all contact with her friends and extended family. They are now married.

In some instances, parents or relatives receive warning that something is about to happen.

George received a call on his telephone. The caller spoke only a few words: "Take care of your daughter."

**Abductors Target Vulnerable Women and Girls, and Girls in Vulnerable and Unprotected Moments.**

The concluding observations of the UN's Commission on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) express concern "at the very limited information and statistics provided about vulnerable groups of women and girls" in Egypt.<sup>27</sup>

Coptic women and girls are vulnerable in the following ways:

1. They are members of a religious minority.
2. They come from closed, insular communities.

<sup>27</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Egypt. CEDAW/C/EGY/C0/7. Forty-fifth session. 5 February 2010. Paragraph (45)

### 3. Their minority status is the basis for legal and social discrimination

Coptic women and girls are vulnerable because of their minority status, yet little effort is made by the Egyptian Government to document this vulnerability or its consequences.

A counselor in a family center describes how the young women are vulnerable because they come from very closed communities. Young women want something more, including an education and a career, and they are vulnerable to offers of excitement and romance. What they do not realize is that the offers they are presented with are all a fraud.

“One young woman sold her religion for a glass of sugar cane juice,” says a social worker. It was not so much for the juice, which she could get anywhere. It was for the kindness, which she never experienced.

Says a lawyer: “The abductors read people. They look for girls who are vulnerable. In many cases, the abductors are neighbors or family friends. They know the habits and the vulnerabilities of the family. And once they figure these out, they make their move.” He goes on to say that if the issues are family hardships, inducement usually comes in the form of material support (or the promise of support). If the family issues are emotional, the abductors promise romance.

A grieving father told us, “My daughter was illiterate. She knows nothing except home, family and church.”

But not all girls are from economically depressed family situations. In some cases, Coptic women are abducted from wealthy families, or families of means. Ransoms are not requested, indicating that the abductions are not driven by economic gain. Rather, these women disappear or are abducted when they are away from their homes, in transit from home to work, or traveling to different areas.

#### Captors Sever Contact Between Victims and Their Families.

The first task of the captor is to come between a young woman and members of her family. They can do this by force, taking away her phone and family connections. They lock her up, denying her any mobility. They threaten her, telling her that, even if she runs away, her family will never accept her; they will punish her and put her in a monastery. Eventually a young woman is brainwashed and believes that she will be safe only with her Muslim captor. Ultimately, she will be truly safe only if she converts to Islam. Because there is no obligation for a Christian woman who marries a Muslim man to convert to Islam, Attorney Stefanos claims that conversion is the ultimate goal of the captivity.

George and his wife have not heard from their daughter since August 2011.

S. disappeared on February 4, 2011. The family has not heard from her.

M. left home on May 3, 2011; no one has heard from her since.

N. disappeared on June 30, 2010. The only signs of life the mother had were through a YouTube video in which N. and her daughter M. announced their conversion to Islam.

N. did not return from a tutoring session on August 9, 2010. The only communication the parents have received was through a YouTube video documenting N.'s conversion to Islam.

#### Captors Make Use of Measures Involving Force, Fraud and Coercion.

A young woman consents to a glass of sugar cane juice and the attention of a man whose words promise a life of love, ease and provision. Another shares drinks with a mother who is also waiting for children after school. And a third seeks friendship and escape from a harsh and sometimes abusive home environment. Victims who have not literally been abducted nonetheless did not consent to being ripped from their family without the possibility of ever seeing them again; nor do they consent to being forcibly converted to a religion other than their own. They do not consent to a life of captivity within one small apartment, every outing supervised by a member of her new husband's family. They said yes to the things that young women say yes to: friendship, romance, hope, a future, safety and security. It is reasonable to expect that most young women would respond in precisely the same way as many young Coptic girls responded to these offers of friendship or romance.

#### *RECOMMENDATIONS*

In developing recommendations for this report, the authors consulted with attorneys and civil society actors in Egypt in order to assess what government actions might support their efforts to protect Coptic women from falling into captivity and, as a result, into forced marriages and conversions. There was considerable consensus as to steps that the government might take.

#### EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT



1. Local police stations will take seriously and file reports on all claims of disappearance of Coptic women and girls. All claims will be investigated and family members kept apprised of the progress of each of these cases.

2. The Egyptian national government will request an annual accounting of all cases of disappearances including open and ongoing cases as well as any prosecutions that resulted from local police investigations.

3. The Egyptian government will create a registry to document the disappearance of minors.

4. Children of parents who convert will retain the religion of their birth until they are 18 years of age, the legal age of consent.

5. The legal age for conversion to Islam will be raised to 18, which is the age of legal consent in Egypt.

6. Laws which penalize discrimination based on religion in the areas of education, employment and the media will be enacted.

#### COPTIC CHURCH

1. The Coptic Church will maintain a central registry documenting instances of disappearances, abductions and forced marriages and conversions of Coptic women.

2. The Coptic Community will educate families and young women on the recruitment and deception patterns that lead to captivity.

#### INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

1. A legal defense fund will be created to enable Coptic families to secure the presence of an attorney.

2. International or national agencies assessing the situation of Coptic women in Egypt will recognize that coercion and fraud are represented in most cases of disappearance, forced marriages and forced conversions, all of which obviate the consent of the victim.

3. International organizations will recognize both the scope and scale of the problem and no longer refer to such offenses as mere "allegations."

#### APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF CASES

##### CASE 1

Date of disappearance: August 28, 2011

Victim: 17-year-old girl

Source of information: Personal interview with victim's father, copies of missing persons ads in newspapers, police report references.

Current Status: There has been no news of the daughter.

Summary: On August 11, Victim's father received a threatening call from a private phone. The caller spoke the following words: "Take care of your daughter."

The number appeared on his screen. He tried to call back and send texts but received no answer. He reported the threats to the police but received no response. For almost two weeks, the father stayed at home to take care of his daughter, but finally he had to go to work. He was gone for a few hours and when he returned, his daughter was gone. She had asked her mother for permission to go to the supermarket, 250 meters from her house. She had been gone 15 minutes. She was bored and she complained about being locked up. Her father went after her but could not find her.

He looked everywhere and could find no signs of her. He reported the disappearance to the police who sent him from one station to the other. He was finally able to file a report. His complaint was not taken seriously. He asked that the phone number be tracked; it was sent to the investigation department and he was told that this could take three weeks. He conducted his own research and was able to get a name but the police did nothing to follow up.

The parents have heard nothing from their daughter since her disappearance. Since that time, the father learned of 4 similar cases of unexplained and unreported disappearances of daughters in his neighborhood. He placed missing persons ads in the newspapers but received no response. The mother remains distraught and the father writes anguished poems about his daughter.

##### CASE 2

Date of disappearance: September 10, 2010

Subject: 26-year-old married woman

Source of information: Personal interview

Current status: Woman has since returned to her Coptic husband

Summary: A 26-year-old married woman had problems with her husband. She was married at the age of 16. Her husband beat her. He was unemployed and she worked to support the family. She worked in a telephone company and was befriended by a Muslim male colleague. She confided in him about her bad marriage.

Their relationship became a friendship. When the woman's husband found out, he beat her in the street; her Muslim friend came to her rescue and took her away to a safe place. Her uncle found out and forced her to go to a monastery but she ran away instead and went back to the Muslim man. She stayed with him and converted to Islam; they were married and she became pregnant. Eventually, because of her two older children she returned to her husband and had him declared the legal father of her daughter. She did not feel as if the Muslim man had done anything wrong.

CASE 3:

Date of disappearance: May 20, 2011

Subject: 19-year-old single woman living at home

Source of information: Personal interview with victim's father and family attorney; recorded telephone conversations; police reports.

Current status: Although the father has been able to speak to his daughter by telephone, the family has not been able to see her since her disappearance.

Summary: Victim is a 19-year old girl who had finished her training as a computer technician. She did not return home from work. Her mother reported her absence to the police at 6 PM; there was no formal accusation. At 11 PM the police came to the home and told the family that the Victim had married a Muslim man. The mother had a stroke and the rest of the family thought she had gone willingly with her new husband for up to 3 weeks after the incident.

On June 20, the victim was moved from Cairo to another city and called her father. The father recorded this initial conversation, which is abruptly interrupted by the sound of a man entering the room. In a subsequent call, the man says, "She is unconscious now but let me tell you something: this girl is more important to me than anything else. I swear to God if something happens to her, I will kill all of you and I will burn the church, and you know that I can do that."

The victim's lawyer took the case to the Attorney General and requested three things: 1) address the threats to the father and the church in the recorded message, 2) allow the father to meet with his daughter, and 3) respect the wishes of the daughter regarding her religious identity. To date, the lawyer has received no response.

Victim has called her father now 8 times, asking for some kind of help. She speaks to him of abuse and mistreatment. She is with Muslims and reports that she is beaten when she makes the sign of the cross. She is imprisoned in a room, and occasionally has access to a phone. The father knows where she is but is afraid that if he tries to intervene the consequences will be worse. His position in the army does not help. Out of desperation, the father told her to cut herself so that the family would take her to the hospital. There, he might get a chance to see her. Unfortunately for him, the family asked the doctor to come to the house.

CASE 4:

Date of disappearance: September 15, 2010

Victim: Young married woman with 3-year-old daughter.

Source of information: Interview with victim's lawyer.

Current status: Victim has remained with her Muslim husband and converted to Islam.

Summary: The victim was married with a three-year old daughter; her husband was abusive. A young Muslim farmer offered to help her; he was already married. The first wife contacted the victim's family out of jealousy and the family placed the young woman in a monastery where she stayed for 10 days. She was able to contact her Muslim husband, who reported what had happened to the imam. The imam sent a delegation to rescue her. A gun was fired into the air. A rumor spread that a Christian killed a Muslim and the church was burned. In all, 11 people died: 5 Muslims and 6 Christians. 57 were injured. The subject and her Muslim husband were arrested and accused of causing a riot. She was released two weeks later. Her conversion was announced via YouTube.

CASE 5:

Date of disappearance: April 6, 2011

Victim: 31-year-old married woman with two children

Source of Information: Interview with victim's attorney; interview with victim and members of her family.

Current status: Victim lives with her relatives. She is not able to see her children, who are now considered Muslim by virtue of her "conversion." Her husband has severed contact with her.

Summary: The victim was married to a prominent and wealthy businessman with two children, a girl and a boy. Every day, she took the children to private school

in a hired private car. While waiting for their children, mothers meet and talk. One mother in particular, the taxi driver's aunt, was very friendly. They began to buy each other a drink of juice or soda. The victim reported feeling odd after some of the drinks. On April 6, she took her children to school and noticed on the way back that the cab was going a different way home. They ended up at Al Azhar Mosque. She reported feeling physically helpless. She has little memory of what happened but now has a conversion document which states that she is single and has changed her religion. The document also states that any underage children will automatically become Muslims. Her name was changed to a Muslim name. She was given a Muslim ID. As she regained consciousness, she realized she was veiled. She was taken to another city in the Delta Region where she was locked up and kept in isolation. The family was able to trace her location through her mobile phone.

She was forced to sign papers divorcing her husband. For five months, she was never permitted to go out. She was not beaten. She was able to call her mother from time to time. She was frightened. On Sept. 10, the Muslim family left her on her own and she called her cousin who came to get her. Since that time, she has been living with her cousin and his family. They all receive regular threats.

Her husband, fearful that the children will be taken away and raised as Muslims, has cut off all contact with her. The victim and her attorney believe that the abduction happened because she was challenging the increased Islamic focus in her son's school. If she changes her status back to Christian, the state will automatically take her children because of the document she signed.

CASE 6:

Date of disappearance: February 4, 2011

Victim: 23-year-old single woman who lived with her parents

Source of information: Interview with victim's father and family lawyer

Current status: There has been no contact with the victim since her disappearance.

Summary: The victim was 23 years old. She worked in a plastics factory and lived next door to her parents. She had lunch at home every day. On the evening of February 4, she went to evening church services with her mother. At the end of the evening, the mother could not find her daughter. She ran into the streets, and a little girl told her that a microbus full of girls stopped and took her daughter.

The family went to all the local hospitals, morgues, and coffee shops and surrounding communities to find their daughter. They have heard nothing since her disappearance. The father indicates that he tried to report the disappearance several times before his request was taken seriously. The anguished father told us, "Our daughter is illiterate - all she knows is home, work, church." He felt that he needed to protect himself and so bought a gun. "Kids in the streets have pistols," he said. "Why not me?"

The victim's brother is equally devastated. He says he has three choices: to find his sister, to kill himself, or to wait for death.

The father knows of other families to whom this has happened and says, "Because we are Christians, we are slaughtered."

CASE 7:

Date of disappearance: October 2009

Victim: 24-year-old-married woman

Source of information: Personal interview; family lawyer

Current status: Living with relatives, not able to find a place to live. Her husband is currently in prison.

Summary: The victim ran away from her parents and married a Christian man when she was 20 years old. Because of her parents' disapproval and her husband's inability to get a job, the couple had a difficult time finding a permanent location. When her husband was sent to prison for non-payment of a debt, her family ostracized her. At the same time, members from a Muslim social service organization reached out to her and offered her assistance. They took her and her young child to a house with other women and surgically removed her Coptic tattoo. Eventually her husband demanded her release and they lived together for a time. However, his numerous attempts at finding work failed and he is now once again in prison. The victim is not able to return to her village and she lives with her brother. She is under pressure to return to the Muslim service organization and she and her brother have been threatened and attacked.

CASE 8:

Victim: Young mother of three daughters, ages 4, 7 and 11.

Source of information: Personal interview; family lawyer.

Current status: Children are still considered to be legally Muslim.

Victim's father converted to Islam. It is customary that when a parent converts, all underage children are immediately converted as well. This affected 6 children in her family. Her mother took the youngest girls and placed them in the care of the Orthodox Church to protect them. They remained in an orphanage for 8 years. After her mother finally returned for her, the victim discovered that she and her siblings were legally Muslim. At the age of 18, she became engaged but her fiancé proved abusive and she returned to her family. When she applied for her own ID card, she was told she was Muslim. She married a Muslim police officer, feeling that there was no place else for her.

Eventually, her conversion was overturned; she left her Muslim husband and married a young Christian man who was also abusive. She has since left him. Her life is constantly threatened by the family of her first husband. Her daughters are considered to be Muslim because of her former status as a Muslim and she fears for their safety.

CASE 9:

Date of disappearance: October 2009

Victim: Married woman, 22 years old with a child.

Source of information: Family lawyer and father.

Current status: She is still missing and there has been no communication

Summary: The family had moved to Cairo 4 years prior to the abduction because the husband had found a job in the capital city. On the day of her disappearance, she left home with her child and has not been heard from since. Initially the police refused to file a report and tried to accuse the husband.

Neither the lawyer nor the father has heard from the victim since her disappearance.

CASE 10:

Date of disappearance: May 21, 2011

Victim: Unmarried woman, 18 years old, living with her family

Source of information: Family lawyer

Current status: Victim has returned home but is considered legally married to a Muslim

Summary: This young woman was drugged by a man working for her father. He subsequently abducted her, raped her and blackmailed her, threatening to harm her sister if she fought him. On the 28th of May, he took her to Alexandria and began pressuring her to marry him and convert to Islam. She was able to escape and call her father, who came to get her. She is now living at home; however, she is considered to be legally married to a Muslim and her identity card states her religion as Islam.

CASE 11:

Date of disappearance: June 30, 2010

Victim: Married woman with three children under 18

Source of information: Personal interview with mother; family attorney

Current status: The victim and her children remain missing. Her mother has had no personal contact with them and learned about their conversion on a YouTube video.

Summary: On June 30, 2010, the mother was admitted to the hospital. Her married daughter, who lived in another city, was planning to come and care for her. When she did not show up, the mother began to worry and called the husband, who said his wife had left as planned. She reported the disappearance to the police who reluctantly registered the disappearance of the young mother with three children. With no support from the authorities, the mother spent extensive personal resources trying to find indications of her family's whereabouts. She learned that her daughter had been befriended by a Muslim woman in her neighborhood who also vanished the same day, and that her granddaughter had a close Muslim male friend at the university. She subsequently learned that her granddaughter married this man.

CASE 12:

Date of disappearance: April 8, 2011

Victim: Young unmarried woman living with her father and brothers; 17 years old.

Source of information: Personal interview with father; police reports.

Current status: The father has had no communication with his daughter since her disappearance.

Summary: The father is a businessman who owns a cabinet-making company. His wife passed away and his daughter cared for the family. She was 17 years old. On April 8, 2011, she went to her tutorial class and never made it home. A Muslim

girl called the father and told him that she was not well and would not come home. The father got friends together to look for her. Three days after her disappearance he filed a police report. The father was able to track the daughter's movements by tracing the SIM card in her phone. There has been nothing on YouTube or other sites.

**CASE 13:**

Date of Disappearance: August 9, 2010

Victim: Unmarried young woman, 18 years old.

Source of Information: Personal interview with brother

Current Status: There has been no contact with the victim since her disappearance.

Summary: The victim set out for a tutoring class but never arrived. In February 2011 she appeared fully veiled on YouTube saying that she had converted 5 months prior to leaving home. She said she had been able to see how the church does not make sense and is an act of evil. There has been no personal communication with her.

**CASE 14:**

Date of disappearance: June 14, 2007

Victim: Young unmarried girl, 19 years old

Source of information: Personal interview with mother; family lawyer

Current status: The mother has seen her daughter one time since her abduction.

Summary: The young woman went to meet friends for pizza and never came home. Her friends said she was not feeling well and left the gathering early with a Muslim girl. The police reluctantly filed a report.

The family has had minimal contact with her and the mother has only seen her once since her abduction. The father learned that she was forced to marry a Muslim. The mother has heard reports that the daughter is being blackmailed with accusations of prostitution and that she feels trapped. The family launched an appeal on television stating that the family loved her and wanted her back, but there were no results.

**CASE 15:**

Date of disappearance: June 4, 2010

Victim: Single young woman living at home, 21 years old.

Source of information: Attorney files

Current Status: Still missing; no communication with family

Summary: The victim's mother filed a missing persons report two days after her daughter disappeared. There has been no news from the daughter since her disappearance.

**CASE 16:**

Date of Disappearance: June 20, 2010. Missing persons report filed July 31, 2010

Victim: Married woman, 34 years old

Source of Information: Attorney files, police report.

Current Status: Still missing, no communication with family

Victim's husband reported her missing. There has been no news since her disappearance.

**CASE 17:**

Date of disappearance: June 20, 2010

Victim: Unmarried young woman

Source of information: Attorney files, police report.

Current Status: Still missing; no communication with family.

**CASE 18:**

Date of disappearance: October 12, 2010

Victim: Unmarried young woman; 18 years old.

Source of information: Attorney files

Current status: Still missing; no communication with family,

The young woman was reported missing by her mother.

**CASE 19:**

Date of disappearance: December 9, 2011

Victim: Married woman with two children; 33 years old.

Source of information: Website, police reports.

Current Status: Still missing; no communication.

Summary: On December 9, 2011, at 8:30 PM, victim left home for a hairdresser appointment and to buy her little boy a present for his birthday; when she did not

return, her family filed a missing persons report with the local police station. There was no record of her conversion. She has not returned and her family has not heard anything about her at the time of this writing.

CASE 20:

Date of disappearance: November 24, 2011

Victim: Unmarried young girl living at home, 15 years old.

Source of information: Website, police report.

Summary: The victim disappeared on November 24, 2011. A report was filed at the local police station naming her abductor. There were witnesses to the abduction. The victim was returned to her home on January 11, 2012. The family is not releasing any information and will not talk publicly about the experience.

CASE 21:

Date of disappearance: December 23, 2011

Victim: Unmarried girl living at home, 18 years old.

Source of information: Website, police records

Current status: Victim is still missing.

Summary: The victim disappeared on December 23, 2011. She left home to meet her private tutor and has not been seen since. Friends report that on several occasions prior to her disappearance, she was approached by individuals in cars, but that each time she ran away. Her family has heard nothing from her since her disappearance.

PREPARED TESTIMONY OF WALID PHARES, CO-SECRETARY GENERAL, THE  
TRANSATLANTIC LEGISLATIVE GROUP ON COUNTERTERRORISM

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Helsinki Commission of the United States Congress, thank you for inviting me to testify today before this august body on the highly provocative and compelling issue of ongoing violence against Coptic women in Egypt, in the form of kidnappings, rape and forced religious conversions.

*1. Violence Against Coptic Women in Egypt*

As many experts have already testified before this prestigious forum over the past few years, and last year in particular, individual acts of violence against Egyptian Coptic women, both individually and collectively, have been unrelenting, repetitive, and directed almost exclusively at young single women at of marriage age or under.

This violence, which is described in several reports already submitted to your commission, committees in the House and Senate, as well as to international legislatures that include the European Parliament, House of Lords, and French National Assembly, reveal some disturbing trends:

- a. The attacks have been ongoing for more than three decades, with peaks in some years.
- b. The victims are primarily young Christian women.
- c. Egyptian security and judicial authorities have not helped the families of these girls by trying to rescue or recover them.
- d. An overwhelming majority of the kidnappings and violence have been carried out by individuals and groups who claim to be acting on their belief in an ideology, a doctrine, a set of fundamental beliefs known as Salafism or Jihadism which they claim is the strict implementation of shariah laws.
- e. An overwhelming majority of these crimes have been dismissed by government security and justice institutions, and the radical factions have been protecting the perpetrators, assigning blame to the female victims and their families.
- f. Violence against young Christian women in Egypt has continued after the downfall of the previous regime, and formation of the current alternative Government and its institutions.

These findings prompt the following questions:

- a. Have the attacks been widespread and consistently over time? Is the history of these attacks reflective of the legal and security status of the Coptic Christian community?
- b. Is the violence committed by an organized movement or by individuals who claim to be acting on behalf of an ideological movement?
- c. Does the attitude of government security, judicial, and political institutions reflect cooperation with the attackers, or at least neglect of a segment of Egyptian society?
- d. What are the consequences of the continuous attacks against Coptic females, and thus the Coptic community, despite the regime change and rise of new institutions in Egypt?
- e. What can and should the United States Government, particularly the Administration, to put an end to these violent practices against the women of the Christian Coptic community?

Answering these questions will equip members of the Commission and thus of Congress with the perspective needed to understand the exact nature of the crisis and make informed recommendations regarding possible new legislation and alternative policies for adoption by the Executive Branch.

*2. The nature of the attacks*

According to prior research submitted to your commission and other Congressional committees and legislatures around the world, targeted attacks against Coptic Christian women are not unrelated and isolated acts of violence. On the contrary, kidnapping and forcing captive women to convert to Islam has been documented for decades, revealing hundreds of victims each year. Research and Coptic sources claim that violence against Coptic women has been practiced since before the rise of modern Egypt. Research also confirms at that this abuse was documented for at least the last decade, especially in the past five years. Therefore, the first characteristic of the crisis is its longstanding history. This means that any solution to the problem must address its historical roots and scope of the violence. Christian Coptic women and girls have been forced from their homes, streets, and neighborhoods prior to and after the Arab Spring, before and after 9/11, and before and after the Cold War ended. Accordingly, this phenomenon is part a larger global crisis that

has stricken the Coptic community under varying governments and regimes. This community, as research and previous hearings have demonstrated, is facing global pressure from extremist elements in the Jihadist and Islamist movements, particularly the Salafists, for years, if not for decades. The attacks against Christian Coptic women and the Christian Coptic community coincide in time line and are consistent with the motives with the acts of violence perpetrated against Coptic targets across Egypt at the hands of extremist elements from *Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya* and the Salafists.

As stated earlier, the attacks have targeted the female Coptic community, particularly younger women who are of the age to marry (and in some instances just about) which begs the question about the long range motive and the political identity of the network of perpetrators. The juxtaposition of well-documented attacks against the Coptic community generally, and young women in particular, reveal an historical pattern of violence against several segments of the Coptic community, including women, youth people, churches and public figures. These actions-also per research, archives and reports-are perpetrated by the same network of militants, from the Jihadi, Salafist and Islamist movements in Egypt.

### 3. *The perpetrators*

While research over the past five years has not revealed a well-designed structure that officially takes responsibility for the attacks against Coptic Christian women, it has shown patterns and statements that indicate the existence of a movement that hails from a well-publicized ideology, namely, Salafist or Islamist fundamentalism, or Jihadism. A thorough review of public records in Egypt, online resources, and past reports submitted to Congress and other legislative bodies around the world, and interviews with the families of the kidnapped victims, reveals a clear picture of the group behind the acts of violence. In almost all cases, the kidnapers argued that their actions were legitimized and inspired by Salafist and jihadist principles. One central tenet of those principles is that individuals—in this case, females—who convert from Christianity to Islam cannot revert back to their original religion, must accept their (forced marriage). In some cases, families of the victims were asked to pay a tribute to recover their daughters.

The reference to Islamist or jihadist views, applicable to Christian Copts in general and women and girls in particular, shows that the acts perpetrated against them and their communities are ideologically and politically motivated, and carried out by men-in some cases with the help of females—are not necessarily formally linked to one central organization. But the hundreds of acts of violence have one pattern in common: a reference to the legitimacy of the violent action. While forbidden by Egyptian law, kidnapping and converting Coptic females was defended by the Salafists as an acceptable behavior. The supporters of such violence often indicate that the girls or women have been open to such conversion or have since accepted it, thus legitimizing the original illegal act of kidnapping. The repetition of the same arguments and scenarios indicates that the movement behind these practices, Salafists, Islamist Fundamentalists, and Jihadists, perceives their actions to be acceptable as a matter of policy and doctrine, thus inspiring more perpetrators to engage in the practice.

### 4. *Government failure and Collaboration*

In parallel, reports by human rights groups as well as Coptic community and liberal Egyptian NGOs, have openly accused local Egyptian police and security forces, national security agencies, including the defunct state security agency “*amn al dawla*,” of either covering up the attacks, or protecting the perpetrators. Human rights and Coptic Christian reports and media describe the assistance provided to kidnapers by security police is exhibited in the rough and negative attitude displayed toward the families of the victims.

The historical timeline of security collaboration with the perpetrators or at a minimum, non-support to the victims and their families, also coincides with the timeline of similar aggressive behavior against the community as a whole. The behavior of state agencies towards the issue of Coptic women and rape, kidnapping and forced conversion has been an element of a wider violence committed against churches, schools or other actors in the Coptic community.

Coptic activists and NGOs -including the Washington DC based Coptic Solidarity International- have accused Egyptian security services under the Mubarak regime, of using Salafists to conduct attacks against Coptic targets to maintain the community under the protection of the government. Coptic and liberal Egyptian NGOs have argued that the new security agencies formed after the collapse of the Mubarak regime continue to allow these practices or help the perpetrators.



### 5. *Consequences of attacks against Coptic women*

If the aggression targeting Christian Coptic women continues and widens, without a determined and massive intervention by the Egyptian Government to put an end to this practice, there will be serious consequences on Egyptian Christian women, their communities, and Egyptian women in general, leading to a weakening of civil society and a dramatic setback to freedom, human rights and democracy in Egypt. The chief consequence of unchecked aggressions against Coptic women the terror it has instilled in the hearts of Christian women who count for at least half of the fifteen or so million Christian Copts of Egypt. The hundreds of repetitive attacks against Coptic women send a clear signal to millions of young women in Egypt who feel targeted by the jihadists and Salafists, compelling them to limit their movement, narrow their social circles, and separate them from Muslim communities. Violence against Coptic women leads to a de-facto gender apartheid in Egypt, where Christian women will be increasingly deterred from finding jobs, expressing their opinion, wearing their own preferred outfits and circulating in public spaces.

The effects on Coptic women will also extend to the entire Christian community as half of its members are increasingly intimidated by acts of violence committed on hundreds of young women. When one segment of community is terrorized, it reverberates throughout their families and communities, forcing the collective into mental ghettos or incentivizing emigration. Rape, abduction and forced conversion are among the root causes of a general sentiment among Copts that pushes thousands of them to flee the country of their ancestors. The ultimate goal of the extremist Salafists of establishment of an Islamist state in Egypt is served by the shrinking Coptic community through emigration. Coptic NGOS, including Coptic Solidarity International claims that Gulf funds and local financial circles sympathetic to Salafism and Wahabism in Egypt have been.

Outside the community, the attacks against Coptic Christian women and their results will bring other consequence to bear on secular Egyptian women in general, both liberal and conservative. By failing to protect its Coptic citizens, the Egyptian Government will be perceived as incapable of protecting other segments of the population also targeted by the Salafists and the jihadists. Muslim liberal and secular women, who already fear the strict implementation and enforcement of sharia law, will be under increasing pressures by the most extreme elements of the Islamist movement to wear the Hijab and later, the full Niqab. The attacks on defenseless Coptic women are a mere prelude to a wider campaign to impose its ideological agenda, clearly seen in the Salafist movement as early as 2011.

### 6. *The role of the US Government*

The United States Government must use every tool at its disposal to stop the persecution of Coptic Christian women and the marginalization of the Coptic community, and on a larger scale, the danger of apartheid against mainstream women in Egypt, regardless of their religions.

Over the past five years, and particularly since the downfall of President Mubarak, there have been calls for the Administration and Congress to use foreign aid to convince the Egyptian government to intervene against these violent practices. So far, conditioning foreign aid on the respect of human rights in Egypt hasn't been successful in changing policies or realities in Egypt. Also, Congressional readiness to condition foreign aid to Egypt on respect for women and minorities rights hasn't convinced the Administration to adopt this strategy for diplomatic reasons.

We recommend for the Helsinki Commission to adopt the following steps as a way to help protect Coptic women and girls in Egypt from abuse, and defend their universal rights.

- a. Reaffirm the conditions on global US Foreign Aid to Egypt of a constitutional provision announced by the drafters of the new Egyptian constitution, that the practices of abducting, torturing and forcing conversions on Coptic women or any element of society is a terrorist act unequivocally punishable by law.
- b. Make a Congressional declaration that crimes against Coptic women inspired by extremist ideologies targeting communities will be considered crimes against humanity punishable under international law
- c. Partner with Coptic and civil society NGOs, extending financial support directly to these entities as part of the global US Aid to Egypt.
- d. Ensure that the educational and informational system in Egypt, particularly state supported institutions, isn't used to propagate the ideology or precepts used by the perpetrators of the attacks as a way to legitimize violence and discrimination against Coptic women or encourage acts of violence against them

*7. Current political situation*

The current political situation in Egypt provides context that should encourage the US Congress to become proactive in helping the US Administration redefine its policy toward Egypt, particularly as minorities and women rights are under attack. For with the arrival of Muslim Brotherhood presidency in M. Mohammed Morsi at helm of the Egyptian republic and with a possible ruling coalition inside the disbanded parliament or the next elected assembly, the ideological agendas of the Islamist movement at large would constitute a greater menace to the liberal segments of civil society and particularly against the Coptic community and its women. Kidnappings and forced conversions have already occurred under the authoritarian but pro-American Government of Mr Mubarak. Under an Islamist authoritarian Government, these practices are highly likely to continue and increase, endangering not only Coptic women but also the rights of Egyptian secular women at large.

It is critical during the transitional period between the Mubarak regime and the future political era, that the United States play a constructive role that ensures balance between all players in Egypt, and particularly in support of the weakest elements of society, namely from the bottom up, Christian women, the Coptic community, Egyptian secular women, youth and the rest of civil society that is committed to pluralist and liberal democracy.





This is an official publication of the  
**Commission on Security and  
Cooperation in Europe.**

★ ★ ★

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