

114TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 5974

To require the Secretary of State to submit an annual report to Congress regarding efforts to restore or repair Christian property in the Arab Republic of Egypt that was burned, damaged, or otherwise destroyed during the sectarian violence in August 2013, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 8, 2016

Mr. TROTT introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

A BILL

To require the Secretary of State to submit an annual report to Congress regarding efforts to restore or repair Christian property in the Arab Republic of Egypt that was burned, damaged, or otherwise destroyed during the sectarian violence in August 2013, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Coptic Churches Ac-
5 countability Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) In August 2013, Islamist-led mobs, burned
2 and destroyed various Christian religious properties
3 and properties owned by Christians in the Arab Re-
4 public of Egypt, following the removal of the govern-
5 ment led by the Muslim Brotherhood.

6 (2) The succeeding government announced that
7 the army would rebuild the churches damaged dur-
8 ing that sectarian violence at government expense.
9 President Sisi, then the Minister of Defense of
10 Egypt, ordered the engineering department of the
11 Egyptian armed forces “to swiftly repair all the af-
12 fected churches, in recognition of the historical and
13 national role played by our Coptic brothers” during
14 that period of sectarian violence.

15 (3) In January 2015, President Sisi was the
16 first Egyptian President to make an appearance at
17 a Coptic Christian Christmas liturgy.

18 (4) On January 6, 2016, President Sisi, speak-
19 ing at St. Mark’s Cathedral in Cairo, Egypt, while
20 attending the Christmas liturgy, said, referring to
21 the August 2013 sectarian violence, “We have taken
22 too long to fix and renovate the churches that were
23 burned . . . this year everything will be fixed. Please
24 accept our apologies for what happened . . . God
25 willing . . . by next year there won’t be a single

1 house or church that is not restored. We will never
2 forget the honorable, respectful, and great stance
3 you and the Pope took during this period.”.

4 (5) The Egyptian military has restored 26 of
5 the 78 churches and other Christian buildings dam-
6 aged during the August 2013 sectarian violence. Pri-
7 vate citizens have restored an additional 23 damaged
8 buildings. A total of 29 buildings in 24 locations
9 have yet to be restored as of September 6, 2016.

10 (6) In August 2016, Egypt passed a new law
11 with respect to church construction that imposes sig-
12 nificant burdens on the ability to build a church.

13 (7) In general, government approval for build-
14 ing or repairing churches has served as a justifica-
15 tion for sectarian violence targeting Christians in
16 Egypt.

17 (8) In El-‘Our, Minya, on March 27, 2015, doz-
18 ens of villagers protested the building of the new
19 church in honor of the Egyptian Christians be-
20 headed by Da’esh militants in Libya in February
21 2015. President Sisi had approved the construction
22 of that church in response to calls by Coptic Ortho-
23 dox Church leaders. A Coptic Orthodox clergyman
24 from the region stated that protestors besieged the
25 existing village church with the pastor and some of

1 his family inside. According to a prominent human
2 rights group, the protestors were armed, threw
3 Molotov cocktails at the church, and set fire to a
4 Christian-owned vehicle. Protestors also threw bricks
5 at the house of another Christian victim.

6 (9) Egyptian government officials frequently
7 participate in informal reconciliation sessions to ad-
8 dress such incidents of sectarian violence or tension,
9 saying that such sessions prevented further violence.
10 According to human rights groups, however, the ses-
11 sions have regularly led to outcomes unfavorable to
12 religious minorities and precluded recourse to the ju-
13 dicial system by such minorities.

14 (10) St. Mark brought Christianity to Egypt,
15 where the Coptic Christians have been the indige-
16 nous people of Egypt for over 2,000 years.

17 (11) The Coptic Church represents the largest
18 Christian community in the Middle East.

19 (12) United States diplomatic leadership con-
20 tributes meaningfully and materially to the inter-
21 national protection of religious minorities and their
22 faith-based practices and places of worship.

23 (13) The International Religious Freedom Act
24 of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6401 et seq.) states that “it
25 shall be the policy of the United States to condemn

1 violations of religious freedom, and to promote, and
2 to assist other governments in the promotion of, the
3 fundamental right to freedom of religion.”.

4 (14) Religious freedom is an essential corner-
5 stone of democracy that promotes respect for indi-
6 vidual liberty and contributes to greater stability,
7 and is a priority value for the United States to pro-
8 mote in its engagement with other countries.

9 **SEC. 3. REPORT.**

10 (a) REPORT ON PROGRESS OF RESTORATION.—Not
11 later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of
12 this Act, and annually thereafter until 2021, the Secretary
13 of State shall submit to the Committee on Foreign Affairs
14 of the House of Representatives and the Committee on
15 Foreign Relations of the Senate a report describing—

16 (1) the progress made in restoring or repairing
17 burned, damaged, or otherwise destroyed Christian
18 religious property and properties owned by Chris-
19 tians in the Arab Republic of Egypt during the sec-
20 tarian violence in August 2013, including a descrip-
21 tion of any discussion between officials of the De-
22 partment of State and representatives of Egypt, oc-
23 ccurring on or after the date of the submission of the
24 most recent report, regarding the restoration or re-

1 pair of such Christian religious property or property
2 owned by Christians;

3 (2) the implementation of the law described in
4 section 2(6), including the number of permits issued
5 for the construction of Christian churches pursuant
6 to such law; and

7 (3) the nature and extent of Egyptian laws and
8 policies regarding the construction of Christian
9 churches or places of worship.

10 (b) INCLUSION OF INFORMATION IN ANNUAL COUN-
11 TRY REPORTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES AND
12 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORTS.—The
13 Secretary of State shall ensure that each Country Report
14 on Human Rights Practices for Egypt required under sec-
15 tions 116(d) and 502B(b) of the Foreign Assistance Act
16 of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2151n(d) and 2304(b)) and each Re-
17 port on International Religious Freedom required under
18 section 102(b) of the International Religious Freedom Act
19 of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6412(b)) submitted after the date of
20 the enactment of this Act contains—

21 (1) a summary of the information described in
22 subsection (a)(1); and

23 (2) a list of each Christian church, place of
24 worship, or other Christian religious property (such
25 as a monastery, Christian school or hospital, monu-

1 ment, relic, or holy site) and each item of property
2 (such as artwork, manuscripts, vestments, vessels, or
3 other artifacts) belonging to a Christian church that
4 was burned, damaged, or otherwise destroyed during
5 the sectarian violence in August 2013.

