Legal framework

Egypt's constitution states that the right to freedom of belief is 'absolute'; however, it limits 'the freedom of practising religious rituals and establishing places of worship' to 'the followers of revealed religions', i.e. Christianity, Islam and Judaism. As such, other religious and belief groups, including Ahmadis, atheists, Baha'is and Quranists, do not enjoy the same legal and constitutional protections.

All Egyptians are required to carry ID cards; however, Christianity, Islam and Judaism are the only available religious designations. In 2009 the Minister of Interior issued an order allowing authorities to use a 'dash' sign in personal documents to indicate that a person belongs to an unrecognised religious or belief group (Order 520); however, these groups still face a raft of difficulties and discrimination, including restrictions on meeting for worship, denial of legal registration of marriages, and denial of burial rights. Egypt's Shi'a minority experiences similar restrictions.

The Egyptian Penal Code (Law 58 (1937)) criminalises contempt of religion. Article 98(f), as amended in 2006, states: 'Whoever exploits religion in order to promote extremist ideologies by word of mouth, in writing or in any other manner, with a view to stirring up sedition, disparaging or contempt of any divine religion or its adherents, or prejudicing national unity shall be punished with imprisonment between six months and five years or paying a fine of at least 500 Egyptian pounds.' The broad and equivocal terminology in this article allows charges to be brought for ambiguously defined offences, and has been increasingly used to target and prosecute members of the atheist community in particular.

Limited advances in freedom of religion or belief

In 2015 President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi became the first serving president in the country's history to attend a Christmas Mass at St Mark's Cathedral in Cairo on Christmas Eve in the Orthodox calendar. The president has also made repeated personal commitments regarding combatting sectarianism and discrimination against the Christian community; however, these sentiments are yet to permeate to the wider society.

In 2016 the Egyptian parliament approved the Church Construction Law, which is aimed at making the process of building and restoring churches easier. As of May 2026 the government committee tasked with overseeing this process had granted legal status to 3,804 churches and affiliated buildings since it began its mandate in 2017. In some cases, approved applications are conditional, and churches must fulfil further requirements regarding building construction, health and safety, and council taxes, in order to retain their status.

On 31 August 2023 Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly reopened Abraham Ben Ezra Synagogue, one of the oldest synagogues in Egypt, after it had been refurbished following the government's 2018 pledge of 1.25 billion Egyptian pounds towards renovating and preserving Jewish religious and cultural sites in the country. On 15 September 2023 the Jewish community in Cairo was able to celebrate Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, for the first time in 70 years.

Despite limited advances in relation to the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), challenges remain for many religious and belief groups, and there has also been a progressive deterioration in the overall human rights situation since the Revolution of 25 January 2011.

Sectarian violence

Violence often manifests along sectarian lines, particularly in Upper Egypt, where church construction remains a primary source of tension. In numerous cases in which Christians have received permission to renovate or build new churches, local Muslims have blocked their attempts to do so, often violently. Consequently, they are forced either to abandon the project, or to make concessions, such as building churches without crosses, domes or bells.

On 6 January 2024, for example, an extremist mob burned and destroyed a temporary church building in the village of Misha'at Zaafaranah in Abu Qarqas, Minya Governorate, Upper Egypt. Local Christians had been using the structure as a place of worship for four months after submitting every document required to obtain a permit, and it had been erected within the brick boundaries of land belonging to the church after they received no objection from the security services.

On 26 April 2024 an extremist mob attacked the construction site of a new Evangelical church in Al-Kom Al-Ahmar village in Minya Governorate, destroying the building's foundations and sewage system. The mob also attacked homes and properties belonging to Christians in the village, although no one was hurt. Christians in the village had obtained all the necessary paperwork and permissions to build the church, and construction had begun on 22 April with a police presence on the site.

The Egyptian authorities are often slow to address sectarian tensions, and to hold perpetrators of violence to account. In many cases, local authorities hold extra-legal reconciliation sessions which impose ad-hoc, unjust and often unconstitutional conditions on the victims of sectarian violence, while failing to punish perpetrators adequately and thereby perpetuating impunity.

On 23 October 2025 sectarian violence broke out in the village of Nazlat Jalf, Beni Mazar, in Minya Governorate, after rumours of a relationship between a 17-year-old Christian boy and a 16-year-old Muslim girl circulated online. Members of the Muslim community reportedly gathered outside Christian homes and properties and threw stones and incendiary objects at them, damaging several houses and fields. Threats and hate speech were also shared on social media, and two individuals (one Christian and one

Muslim) were arrested for their reported involvement in online incitement.

The following day authorities in Nazlat Jalf held a reconciliation session in which they ruled that the family of the Christian teenager accused of being involved in the inter-religious relationship would be fined one million Egyptian pounds (approximately 16,000 GBP) and exiled from the village. There has been no news on the circumstances of the Muslim girl who was allegedly involved in the relationship.

On 8 July 2026 dozens of Muslim residents of the village of Tal Al-Quiblya, in Minya Governorate, attacked the local church building, resulting in injuries to several Christians and damage to the building and the priest's car. The police were deployed quickly and stabilised the situation after arresting four Christian men who were assaulted by members of the mob, and an unknown number of Muslims. The Christians were released two days later, on 10 July, but only after they withdrew a complaint against their assailants.

Terrorism

Terrorist attacks occur periodically in cities, but are mainly concentrated in the Sinai region, where groups including Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis, an affiliate of Islamic State (IS), operate. Special measures introduced in response to the terrorist threat have contributed to a deterioration in the overall human rights climate, and have included a crackdown on civil society and the alleged torture by the security services of detainees in North Sinai.

Targeting of human rights defenders and activists

The authorities continue to crack down on individuals and organisations they perceive as critical of them. A stringent and intrusive non-governmental organisation (NGO) law, updated in 2020, limits NGO activities to 'societal development,' while 'political,' 'religious' or any activities deemed to 'violate public order' are illegal. As a result, the number of NGOs operating in Egypt has continued to fall significantly, while those that remain experience constant surveillance and harassment.

Numerous activists have been arrested and detained, in some cases for longer than the maximum threshold for pre-trial detention permitted under Article 143 of Egypt's Code of Criminal Procedure. Trials are often delayed repeatedly, while many activists have had their detention extended on multiple occasions.

Among those currently imprisoned is Quranist reformist thinker and lawyer Ahmad Abdo Maher, who was convicted of 'contempt of religion and disturbing public peace' and sentenced to five years in prison by an exceptional court in Cairo on 17 November 2021. Mr Maher's work has involved critical research into many controversial issues in Islamic history and theology, and he has been particularly critical of Islamic jurisprudence, the Islamic conquest and the slave trade that accompanied it. His nephew and fellow Quranist, Reda Abdel Rahman, was released from the police station at Kafr Saqr in Al-Sharqiya Governorate on 23 February 2022 after 18 months in pre-trial detention during which he is reported to have suffered mistreatment.

Recent cases of concern

Since 2025 the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), one of the few human rights organisations still functioning in the country, has documented an escalating crackdown on atheists and religious activists.

The Ahmadi Religion of Peace & Light

In March 2025, 17 people were arrested during a campaign against followers of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace & Light (AROPL) that lasted for several weeks. A Syrian refugee who was among them was subsequently deported. The arrestees were not brought before the State Security Prosecution until some of them appeared in court in April 2025. On 9 April 2026 the prosecution added a new defendant to the case who had shared posts on social media promoting the religion, and on 22 April it renewed the detention of the 16 remaining individuals against whom the case had been initiated.

According to the EIPR, at least 53 members of the AROPL were arrested in connection with eight cases related to FoRB in 2025. Security forces arrested another individual on 1 March 2026 who appeared before the Public Prosecution on charges of contempt of religion after being held incommunicado for 12 days.

Saeid Mansour Abdulraziq

On 15 July 2025 convert to Christianity Saeid Mansour Abdulraziq was arrested in Al-Matareiah police station, weeks after he asked a lawyer to help him obtain new identification documents that confirmed his change of religion. Mr Abdulraziq appeared before the State Security Prosecution on 22 July, where he was charged with joining a terrorist organisation, stirring unrest and spreading false news.

Mr Abdulraziq converted to Christianity in 2016 and joined the Russian Orthodox Church in Egypt. He endured family rejection, societal hostility and police intimidation whenever he shared his new faith publicly. In 2018 he was able to travel to Russia, where he applied for asylum and began criticising Islam publicly. This angered some members of Russia's Muslim communities and threatened societal unrest.

The Russian authorities arrested Mr Abdulraziq and imprisoned him for one year, after which his asylum was revoked and he was deported to Egypt in 2024. Upon his arrival, the Egyptian authorities interrogated him for a few hours and released him after warning him to remain quiet and avoid proselytising.

On 15 June 2026 Mr Abdulraziq and his defence team attended a court hearing which had been scheduled to hear the testimony of the prosecution witnesses and allow the defence to cross-examine them. However, the cross-

examination did not proceed as planned, and the hearing was postponed to 6 September.

If convicted Mr Abdulraziq faces a possible life sentence or the death penalty.

Magid Zakarya Abdulrahman

In September 2025 authorities arrested Magid Zakarya Abdulrahman, a YouTuber known as the Mufti of Humanity. Mr Abdulrahman's family and lawyer were not informed of his whereabouts until he appeared before the State Security Prosecution 10 days later. Several others who took part in debates on his YouTube channel were also arrested. Their case (6954/2025) has been classified as relating to national security.

Baha'i marriages

In January 2026 the Civil Affairs Department of the Appeal Court in Cairo refused to legally recognise the marriage of a Baha'i couple who have been married since 1981. The couple had successfully registered their marriage with the Family Court in August 2020; however, an appeal against the legal recognition of their marriage submitted by the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Justice and the Head of Civil Affairs Authority was upheld in a verdict issued on 27 January and made public in mid-April after the government issued an executive directive rejecting previous court decisions that recognised Baha'i marriages. The directive instructs the civil affairs authority to mark married Baha'is as 'single' in any civil status documents.

Recommendations

To the government of Egypt:

- Review all cases where defendants are facing blasphemy or related charges under Article 98(f) of the penal code, including a review of the practices of judges and courts where such charges have been brought.
- Increase the number of police and security service personnel in Upper Egypt and ensure they proactively investigate reports and incidents of sectarian violence and other crimes targeting religious minority communities, bringing perpetrators swiftly to justice through judicial processes.
- Extend revised legislation on church building and renovation to cover the houses of worship of every religious and belief community.
- Immediately and unconditionally release all human rights defenders (HRDs) detained or awaiting trial on charges derived from their civil society work.
- Respect the legal stipulations for pre-trial detention.
- Urgently amend the NGO law in line with international norms and standards.
- Issue a standing invitation to UN Special Procedures, ensuring they have unhindered access to all parts of the country and are able to meet with members of civil society without reprisal.

To the United Nations and Member States:

- Call on the government of Egypt to respect, protect and fulfil the right to FoRB for all religious and belief communities, including by amending Article 64 of the constitution and repealing Law 263 (1960) on religious minorities, in accordance with Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), noting the recommendations of General Comment 22.
- Urge all relevant UN mechanisms, including the Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies, to include the right to FoRB in their reporting on Egypt, addressing the vulnerabilities and violations faced by religious and belief communities, and those seeking to assist them.
- Raise FoRB violations during the Universal Periodic Review process, Human Rights Council sessions, and through other key international human rights instruments, offering recommendations to advance the right to FoRB.
- Call on Egypt to immediately lift travel bans and unfreeze the assets of HRDs, other individuals from civil society, and NGOs, and to condemn reprisals faced by those seeking to engage with the UN on the country's human rights situation.
- Monitor reports of arbitrary detention, follow court proceedings, and call on Egypt to protect all persons from arbitrary detention and to guarantee the right to a fair trial.
- Urge the government of Egypt, at every appropriate opportunity, to implement the recommendations highlighted in the recommendation section above 'To the government of Egypt'.

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