

Introduction

1. CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide) and CSW-Nigeria are a human rights organisations specialising in the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB).
2. This submission seeks to draw attention to the situation of FoRB in Egypt ahead of the state's fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Legal framework

3. Egypt's constitution states the right to freedom of belief is 'absolute', but 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, Humanists and Quranists, do not enjoy the same legal and constitutional protections.
4. Egypt has signed and ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which stipulates the right of everyone 'to freedom of thought, conscience and religion,' including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of one's choice, and the 'freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private,' to manifest one's religion or belief 'in worship, observance, practice and teaching.'¹
5. During the third cycle of the UPR, Egypt noted recommendations from Brazil and Haiti² to remove religious classification from identity cards. All Egyptians are required to carry these cards; however, Christianity, Islam and Judaism are the only available religious designations.
6. 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.

Limited advances in freedom of religion or belief

7. Egypt supported six recommendations relating to FoRB during the third cycle of the UPR, including a recommendation from Malta to 'Continue efforts aimed at ensuring respect for freedom of religion or belief in law and in practice, in full conformity with international

standards.'³

8. It also supported recommendations from Gabon, Qatar and Uganda to combat discrimination,⁴ with the former specifically mentioning discrimination 'based on religion', and a recommendation from Japan to 'Continue and strengthen policies to protect and promote the rights of refugees and minorities.'⁵
9. As has been observed in Egypt over the past decade, there were limited advances in the situation of the right to FoRB during the reporting period.
10. The Egyptian government has continued to grant legal status to churches and places of worship across the country following the approval of the Church Construction Law (Law No. 80 of 2016) by the Egyptian Parliament on 30 August 2016. As of January 2024, 3160 churches had been granted legal status since the government committee overseeing their legalisation began its mandate in 2017.⁶
11. In 2021, Governor Oussama Al-Qadi of Minya Governorate – a state with extremely high levels of sectarian tension which often degenerate into violence – established a special committee to oversee the implementation of the Church Construction Law. The governor encouraged civil servants in Minya to resolve issues related to the construction and renovation of churches speedily, and to increase the level of communication and liaison with church leaders and the local Christian community.
12. On 31 August 2023 Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly opened Abraham Ben Ezra Synagogue, one of the oldest Jewish Synagogues in Egypt, after it had been renovated following the government's 2018 pledge of 1.25 billion Egyptian Pounds towards renovating and preserving Jewish religious and cultural sites in the country.
13. 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.

Discrimination against religious and belief groups

14. Despite these advances, challenges remain for many religious and belief groups. Whilst the Church Construction Law has allowed for the granting of legal status to churches and places of worship across the country, the legislation remains discriminatory, as these requirements do not apply to Sunni places of worship.

1 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 18.1

2 United Nations, Report of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review: Egypt Addendum, A/HRC/43/16/Add.1, 5 March 2020, Recommendations 31.81 and 31.162, respectively. <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g20/063/71/pdf/g2006371.pdf?token=8tkJfndkpySXWIZ8zq&fe=true>.

3 Ibid, recommendations 31.72 (Malta), 31.161 (Haiti), 31.164 (Indonesia), 31.169 (Russia), 31.179 (Armenia), and 31.184 (Democratic Republic of Congo).

4 Ibid, recommendations 31.63, 31.58 and 31.59, respectively.

5 Ibid, recommendation 31.365.

6 Egypt Initiative for Personal Rights, 'EIPR condemns the suspension of building permits for 3 churches in Minya following sectarian tensions' 29 January 2024, <https://eipr.org/press/2024/01/29/دعوى-إطارات-تحت-مراقبة-الشرطة-تؤخر-بناء-الكنائس-في-منيا>

15. On 30 May 2021 authorities confiscated land belonging to the Saint Macarius Monastery in Wadi Al-Rayyan, Al-Fayyoun Governorate, after the monastery failed to pay rental levies due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Officials, supported by the police force, used bulldozers to demolish the fence and other constructions that had been erected by the monks who live there. A number of monks who protested and tried to stop the operation were arrested and released shortly afterwards. The monastery was founded in 360 AD, and had only been subject to the rental levies since 2017, when the Ministry of Environment granted the monks the right to use the land on which the monastery stood and the surrounding area provided they pay 500,000 Egyptian Pounds per year for 3,000 acres of land surrounded by a fence, and a further four million Egyptian Pounds per year for 1,000 acres of land outside the fenced area.
 16. Other religious groups, such as the Ahmadi, Baha'i and Shi'a communities, are not covered by the Church Construction Law, and continue to face discrimination and hostility from the authorities and the wider Egyptian society.
 17. The Ahmadiyya community, who consider themselves to be Muslims, but are regarded by some other Muslims as heretical, are obliged, among other things, to meet in private homes.
 18. The Baha'i community experiences similar discrimination, and the lack of legal recognition means Baha'i marriages cannot be legally registered.
 19. The Shi'a community regularly experiences hate speech and, along with the Quranists,⁷ face discrimination and restrictions on the free exercise of their religious beliefs.
 20. On 27 December 2021 an administrative court in Alexandria ruled that local authorities were not obliged to allocate land to be used as a cemetery for unrecognised religious and belief groups, effectively granting the authorities the power to deprive members of these unrecognised communities of their entitlement as citizens to a burial place in their own country.
- Blasphemy laws**
21. 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.'
 22. The broad and equivocal terminology in this article allows charges to be brought for ambiguously defined offences, in contravention not only of the commitments Egypt made to uphold FoRB during the previous UPR cycle, but also its support for 12 recommendations relating to guaranteeing of the right to freedom of expression.⁸
 23. On 21 June 2020 atheist blogger Anas Hussein appeared before a court in Alexandria and was charged with 'defaming religion and the misuse of social media and managing a Facebook page for Egyptian atheists.'⁹ He was sentenced to three years in prison and received a fine of 300,000 Egyptian Pounds.
 24. On 27 June 2020 a National Security Court in Mashtoul el Souk, Al Sharqiyya Governorate sentenced Mustafa Al-Ramli and Mahmoud Youssef to one year in prison for 'spreading and promoting' the Shia school of Islam.¹⁰ The two men were arrested on 16 May 2019 and initially taken to an unknown location before being referred to the State Prosecution in Mashtoul el Souk on 20 July 2019. Police agents confiscated Shi'a books and religious symbols from their homes, and they were accused of 'illegally establishing a group to proselytise the Shi'a faith.' The State Prosecution based its argument against the defendants on Article 98(f) of the Penal Code.
 25. On 22 August 2020 police in Kafr Saqr, Al-Sharqiya Governorate arrested several members of the family of Professor Ahmed Sobhy Mansour, a renowned Quranic thinker and former lecturer at Al-Azhar University. All but one were released a few days later, but Quranic blogger Reda Abdel Rahman was held incommunicado for 44 days and subsequently spent 18 months in pre-trial detention prior to his release on 23 February 2022. Mr Abdel Rahman was charged with 'membership of ISIS' and is reported to have suffered mistreatment whilst in detention. His family also reported that his health deteriorated whilst incarcerated, and that they had difficulty obtaining permits to visit him. Mr Abdel Rahman had been arrested and interrogated on several occasions prior to his detention in connection with articles he wrote challenging the extremist narratives underpinning the ideology of political Islamist movements.
 26. On 12 November 2020 comedian Mohammad Ashraf was arrested and accused of 'contempt of religion and disturbing the public peace' after mocking the

⁷ Those who view the Quran as the sole source of Islamic law and guidance.

⁸ United Nations, Report of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review: Egypt Addendum, A/HRC/43/16/Add.1, 5 March 2020, Recommendations 31.165 (Norway), 31.168 (Peru), 31.171 (Spain), 31.174 (Switzerland), 31.178 (Argentina), 31.182 (Canada), 31.188 (Estonia), 31.189 (France), 31.190 (Germany), 31.191 (Greece), 31.192 (Italy) and 31.199 (Mongolia). <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g20/063/71/pdf/g2006371.pdf?token=8tkJfndkpySXWIZ8zq&fe=true>.

⁹ Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 'Two men sentenced to prison for 'spreading and promoting' Shi'a Islam', 29 June 2020 <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/06/29/press/4705/article.htm>

¹⁰ Ibid

presenters of a local Qur'an radio channel. He was released on bail on 21 November.

27. Also on 12 November 2020, Youssef Hani, a Christian teacher, and a Muslim girl named Sundos were arrested following an exchange on Facebook which was deemed 'insulting to Christianity and Islam.' They were released the next day after issuing apologies.
28. On 17 November 2021 an exceptional court in Cairo convicted Quranist reformist thinker and lawyer Ahmad Abdou Maher of 'contempt of religion and disturbing public peace' and sentenced him to five years in prison. 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.

Recommendations

29. **Extend revised legislation on church building and renovation to cover the places of worship of every religious community.**
30. **Amend Article 98(f) of the penal code in line with Article 18 of the ICCPR, noting the recommendations of General Comment 22.**
31. **Review all cases in which defendants are facing charges of blasphemy, insulting religion, insulting Islam, disdain and contempt for 'divine' religions, and related charges under Article 98(f) of the penal code, including a review of court practices and judges where these charges have been brought.**

Sectarian violence

32. Sectarian violence, often targeting Christians, remained prevalent during the reporting period, despite Egypt's support for a recommendation from Haiti to 'Ensure that local and regional governments take the appropriate measures to protect Christians from extremists, in particular in rural areas'¹¹ during the previous UPR cycle.
33. On 5 October 2020 an extremist mob attacked the homes of Christians in the village of Dabbous in the Samalout suburb of Minya Governorate after tensions arose when a fight broke out between some Copts and two Muslim men from a neighbouring village at a Coptic wedding on 3 October. Samalout police were deployed to the village in the aftermath of the attacks and arrested a number of attackers and 12 Copts who had tried to defend themselves.
34. On 25 November 2020 hundreds of Muslim villagers attacked the properties of local Christians in the village of Barsha in Minya Governorate following rumours that a Christian man named Gerges Sameeh Zaki had posted a comment on his personal Facebook page that was deemed insulting to Islam. Mr Zaki claimed his page

had been hacked. A minibus belonging to the local church was burnt, and several homes and properties were damaged. Mr Zaki was arrested in accordance with article 98 (f). In September 2022, the case was dropped and he was released after spending 22 months in pre-trial detention.

35. In November 2021 the headmaster and several other teachers at Al-Tharwa school in Ezbat Beshri, Samalout, Minya governorate, ordered Christian students to remove any pendants or bracelets bearing a cross. CSW sources reported that some Christians students were beaten by teachers and Muslim students after the order was given. In one incident, a female teacher beat a Christian student and encouraged other students to beat him, snatch his pendant and destroy the cross.
36. On 7 April 2022 Father Arsanious Wadid, a Coptic Orthodox priest, was fatally stabbed by a 60-year-old Muslim man on the seaside promenade in Alexandria. Father Wadid's attacker initially asked for assistance before stabbing him in the neck. His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos of London later suggested that the killing was religiously motivated, tweeting: 'In clerical attire in a public space with no one else attacked, it can be safely assumed that [Father Arsanious Wadid] was targeted as a priest.'¹²
37. On 28 July 2022 Joseph Israel – a Christian man – and his son were attacked by Ahmad Mohammad outside Mr Israel's wine shop in Khatam El Morsaleen Street in the Omrania district of Giza in Giza Governorate. Mr Mohammad, a Muslim, reportedly attacked both men with a knife before some of Mr Israel's Muslim neighbours intervened and beat the assailant. All three men required treatment in hospital for their injuries. In a post on Facebook, Coptic journalist Nader Shokry suggested that the attack was the result of hate speech and sectarian incitement by Islamist preachers such as Sheikh Abdullah Rushdy and Sheikh Mabrook Attia.
38. In November 2023 a mob attacked a Christian man and burned down his house which was under construction in the village of Beni Khyar in Abou Qarqas, Minya Governorate.
39. On 18 December 2023 an extremist mob attacked a church building site and Christian homes and properties in Al-Azeeb village in Samalout, Minya Governorate, shortly after the Christian community received a permit to build a church in the village, which is home to an estimated 3,000 Coptic Orthodox Christians. The attackers clashed with local police, who were deployed quickly to contain the situation, and threw stones and Molotov cocktails at Christians and their properties, setting fire to several houses and livestock.
40. On 6 January 2024 an extremist mob burned and destroyed a temporary church building in the village of

11 United Nations, Report of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review: Egypt Addendum, A/HRC/43/16/Add.1, 5 March 2020, Recommendation 31.161. <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g20/063/71/pdf/g2006371.pdf?token=8tkJfndkpySXWIZ8zq&fe=true>.

12 X (formerly Twitter), Archbishop Angaelos @BishopAngaelos, 8 April 2022 <https://x.com/BishopAngaelos/status/1512339616946343940>

Misha'at Zaafaranah in Abou Qarqas, Minya Governorate. Local Christians had been using the structure as a place of worship for four months after submitting all the documents 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 security services.

41. On 23 April 2024 extremists attacked the Christian community in Al-Fawakher village in Minya Governorate after rumours were spread online that the community was planning to build a church. Several homes and properties belonging to Christians in the village were destroyed, but local police and firefighters led by the deputy governor and the head of the police department in Minya acted quickly to contain the situation.
42. 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. Once constructed the church will serve more than 2,000 Evangelical Christians in the area.
43. CSW is also concerned by reports of hate speech and sectarian incitement by Islamist preachers such as Sheikh Abdullah Rushdy and Sheikh Mabrook Attia.
44. For example, in 2022, Sheikh Attia appeared in controversial YouTube videos commenting on the murder of university student Naira Ashraf, 21, who was stabbed to death by a male student after rejecting his repeated advances. Sheikh Attia blamed the victim for not wearing a hijab and criticised how she dressed. He had also encouraged women to cover themselves up to avoid attacks. In another video clip, Sheikh Attia criticised the Sermon on the Mount and mocked the name of Jesus.
45. According to one of CSW's sources, a number of lawyers filed complaints against Sheikh Attia with Egypt's Prosecutor General, accusing him of contempt of religion and inciting hate. Sheikh Attia has since stopped releasing such inflammatory videos online. Frustrations remain, however, that Article 98 of the Penal Code, which pertains to contempt of religion, is consistently used to prosecute Christians and intellectuals, but is rarely employed against Sunni preachers who spread hate speech.

Impunity

46. Sectarian tensions are exacerbated by a culture of impunity. Egyptian authorities are often slow to hold perpetrators of violence to account. In many cases, local

authorities hold extra-legal 'reconciliation' sessions which impose ad-hoc, unjust and often un-constitutional conditions on the victims of sectarian violence while failing to punish perpetrators adequately.

47. This persisted during the reporting period, despite Egypt's acceptance of a recommendation from Pakistan to 'Continue efforts to combat impunity for human rights violations.'¹³
48. On 1 May 2020 the Coptic Orthodox Parish of Al-Manofyia withdrew from the Egyptian Family House, a civil society initiative to contain and resolve sectarian incidents via inter-community dialogue, citing and condemning a lack of action on the part of the initiative in the case of the abduction of Rania Abdul-Masseih Halim, a Christian woman who disappeared on 22 April 2020 and subsequently reappeared in a video in which she claimed to have converted to Islam and no longer wanted anyone to search for her. Her family believes these claims were made under duress.
49. On 20 May 2020 authorities in Koum Al-Farag, Al-Behera Governorate demolished a church building following sectarian protests. The building had been used for worship purposes for 15 years; however, tensions arose when the local Muslim community constructed a mosque next door to it, hoping to prevent it from being legalised as a church, and increased when the church constructed two additional floors to accommodate the growing congregation. The mosque that had been built next to it was also demolished, and 14 Christians were arrested when they tried to prevent the demolition.
50. On 14 January 2023 a reconciliation session was held in the village of Ashrouba in Bani Mazar, Minya Governorate to resolve a sectarian dispute between Christian and Muslim villagers. The dispute stemmed from an argument between a Muslim Tuktuk driver and a Christian motorist, following which mobs allegedly attacked homes and shops belonging to Christians. Several homes were damaged, one shop was looted, at least 20 Christians were injured, and the local church was attacked. However, no-one was arrested or held accountable.
51. The authorities have also continued to deny justice to a Christian woman who was attacked, beaten and stripped in public by a mob in the village of Al-Karm in Abou Qarqas, Miny Governorate on 20 May 2016 after her son was accused of having a relationship with a divorced Muslim woman. Mrs Suad Thabet was 72 years old at the time of the attack. Three of her attackers were sentenced to ten years in prison by the criminal court in Beni Suef on 11 January 2020 after repeated delays in the case; however, they were later acquitted by a Court of Appeal on 9 January 2023.

Terrorism

¹³ United Nations, Report of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review: Egypt Addendum, A/HRC/43/16/Add.1, 5 March 2020, Recommendation 31.141 <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g20/063/71/pdf/g2006371.pdf?token=8tkJfndkpySXWIZ8zq&fe=true>.

52. Egypt supported three recommendations to combat terrorism during the third UPR cycle,¹⁴ and has taken positive steps to implement these. However, more must be done to protect civilians and ensure that the threat posed by Islamic State (IS) and other terrorist factions is neutralised completely.
53. In August 2020 an armed gang in a 4x4 vehicle abducted Christians Bakhit Aziz Georgy and Youssef Semaan Gerges in the village of Al-Abtal in Ismailia Governorate. Mr Gerges was released a few days later, while Mr Georgy remained in captivity until approximately February 2021. Mr Georgy and his family moved to another city following his release.
54. In November 2020 IS terrorists abducted 62-year-old Christian Nabil Habashi Salama in broad daylight in Bir Al-Abed in North Sinai. His abductors initially demanded a ransom of five million Egyptian Pounds; however, on 18 April 2021 IS media platforms circulated a video clip depicting Mr Salama's execution, and warning the Christian community that they would be targeted due to their support for the Egyptian army and their loyalty to the Egyptian state.
55. On 30 August 2022 Salama Waheeb Moussa and his son Hani Waheeb Moussa – both Christians – were shot dead by IS operatives, seemingly at random, while working on their family farm in the village of Jilbana near the town of Al-Qantara East in Ismailia Governorate.

Recommendations

56. ***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 minorities, bringing perpetrators swiftly to justice through judicial processes.***
57. ***Monitor the policing of sectarian incidents in order to ensure that members of the security services do not discriminate in the course of their duties, and conduct themselves in accordance with international human rights standards for law enforcement.***
58. ***Initiate civic education programmes to provide human rights and diversity training for police and security service personnel, as well as for local communities.***

Human rights defenders and civil society

59. Egypt supported nine recommendations relating to the protection of and/or the creation of a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders (HRDs) during the third UPR cycle.¹⁵ Four of those recommendations also called for the same provisions to be extended to

civil society organisations (CSOs). Additionally, Egypt supported three recommendations¹⁶ to facilitate the work of civil society that did not mention HRDs.¹⁷

60. In addition, the State Party also supported recommendations from Fiji and Ghana to prevent acts of intimidation or reprisal against those who 'engage with the United Nations and regional human rights systems' or 'cooperate with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights,' respectively.¹⁸
61. Days after Egypt's receipt of these recommendations, police in Cairo raided the home of Coptic activist Rami Kamil and arrested him during the early hours of 23 November 2019. The police refused to allow Mr Kamil to change his clothes, carry his medications or speak to a lawyer, confiscating his laptop, mobile phone, camera and books and taking him to an unknown location where he was interrogated and subjected to physical and psychological pressure.
62. Mr Kamil is a prominent human rights activist who took part in the 2011 uprising and the events that followed it. He is a founding member and the Coordinator of Maspero Youth Union, a Coptic human rights group that emerged following the Maspero massacre of October 2011, in which over 20 Coptic protesters were killed when the Egyptian military attacked a peaceful civil rights demonstration. In July 2018 he accompanied the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Leilani Farha, during a fact-finding visit to Cairo and Minya to investigate the situation of members of the Coptic community who had been displaced from their homes following sectarian incidents.
63. Mr Kamil was accused of joining a terrorist organisation, receiving foreign funding, disturbing public order, inciting the public against the state, and using social media to incite sectarian tensions between Muslims and Christians. He spent more than two years in pre-trial detention, exceeding the limit permitted under Article 143 of the Egyptian Penal Code, and contradicting Egypt's support for a recommendation from Germany to 'Restrict the excessive use of pretrial detention and police probation measures to the narrow limits outlined in article 54 of the Constitution.'¹⁹ He was released on 9 January 2022.
64. In February 2020 authorities arrested Christian activist Patrick George Zaki at Cairo airport following the July 2019 publication of an article in which he described life as an Egyptian Christian. He was subsequently interrogated by Egyptian State Security on 13 July and 9 September 2021 and was eventually charged with

14 Ibid, recommendations 31.131 (Nigeria), 31.132 (India) and 31.133 (Kuwait).

15 Ibid, recommendations 31.178 (Argentina), 31.194 (Italy), 31.198 (Luxembourg), 31.199 (Mongolia), 31.200 (Republic of Korea), 31.202 (Afghanistan), 31.205 (Denmark), 31.206 (Ecuador) and 31.207 (Finland).

16 Ibid, recommendations 31.200 (Republic of Korea), 31.202 (Afghanistan), 31.206 (Ecuador) and 31.207 (Finland).

17 Ibid, Recommendations 31.87 (France), 31.172 (Spain) and 31.186 (Czechia).

18 Ibid, Recommendations 31.195 and 31.196.

19 Ibid, Recommendation 31.88.

‘spreading fake news inside and outside Egypt.’ He was released from prison on 8 December 2021 pending a trial.

65. Mr Zaki was sentenced to three years in prison by an Emergency State Security Court in Al Mansoura Governorate on 18 July 2023. He was taken into custody upon his sentencing, but was pardoned by President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi the following day. Mr Zaki is currently residing in Italy.
66. In a series of raids from 15-19 November 2020 police arrested three staff members of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR).²⁰ The EIPR is one of the few human rights organisations still operating in Egypt and it works on several human rights issues, including FoRB and gender equality. All three men were released in December 2020 following international pressure.
67. In September 2021 an Emergency State Security Court found British-Egyptian pro-democracy activist Alaa Abdel Fattah and his lawyer Mohammad Al Baqer, who had been arrested in September 2019 while attending the interrogation of Mr Fattah, guilty of ‘spreading fake news and undermining national security’. The two men were sentenced to five and four years in prison respectively. Mr Baqer was later pardoned by President Sisi on 19 July 2023. However, Mr Abdel Fattah remains detained.
68. On 30 January 2022 nine Coptic Christians²¹ were provisionally arrested after taking part in protests demanding permission to rebuild St. Joseph and Abu Sefein Church in Ezbat Farajallah village in Minya Governorate, which burnt down in suspicious circumstances in 2016. All nine were released from prison on 23 April 2022.
69. One of the recommendations relating to civil society that Egypt supported during the previous UPR cycle was to ‘Ensure that the new NGO law guarantees the functioning of civil society organizations’.²²
70. This law, which came into effect during the reporting period, limits the activities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to ‘societal development.’ ‘Political’ and ‘religious’ activities, and any 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.

Recommendations

- 71. Immediately and unconditionally release all human rights defenders detained or awaiting trial on charges derived from their civil society work.**
- 72. Respect the legal stipulations for pre-trial detention.**
- 73. Urgently amend the NGO law in line with international norms and standards.**

20 Mr Gasser Abdel-Razek, the CEO of the EIPR; Mr Mohammad Basheer, the EIPR’s director; and Mr Karim Ennara, the Director of the EIPR’s Criminal Justice Unit.

21 Mounir Samir Mounir, Raymond Mamdouh William, Jaid Saad Zekry, Milad Mahrous Tawfiq, Abanoub Magdy Semaan, Gerges Samir Gerges, Shenouda Salib Hosni, Mina Salib Hosni and Milad Reda Tawfiq Ayyad.

22 United Nations, Report of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review: Egypt Addendum, A/HRC/43/16/Add.1, 5 March 2020, Recommendation 31.172 (Spain). <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g20/063/71/pdf/g2006371.pdf?token=8tkJfndkpySXWIZ8zq&fe=true>.

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