



Submission No 33

**Inquiry into Slavery, Slavery-like conditions and People
Trafficking**

Name: Karen Bos
Christian Faith and Freedom

Submission to the:

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade
Human Rights Sub-Committee inquiry into
Slavery, Slave-like Conditions and People Trafficking

On behalf of:

Christian Faith and Freedom

PO Box 9465
Deakin ACT 2600

Karen Bos (Vice President)

Slavery-like Conditions of Coptic Women in Egypt

Increasing reports of human rights abuses which amount to enslavement of ethnic and religious minorities have brought this issue into sharp international focus. Human rights advocates and religious liberty monitors all express extreme concern that the practice is flourishing in many countries, in some instances with the complicity of governments, law enforcement agencies and religious authorities.

This report focuses on Egypt where the practice is particularly prevalent, as the abduction of Coptic women increases with the demands of Salafist extremists to make Egypt an exclusively Islamic nation. It is a prime example of the resurgent aim of bringing the Middle East and North Africa under the domination of Shariah; to eliminate religious freedom, and to replace the human rights enshrined in the Universal Charter and other international conventions with the Shariah-compliant rights of the Cairo Declaration of 1990. The election of President Muhammed Morsi by a democratic process does not appear to have yielded a democratic outcome, or delivered the hoped-for humanitarian reforms for which both Muslim and Christian Egyptians campaigned so courageously in January 2011.

The persecution of Coptic Christians has repercussions for Australia as it swells the numbers seeking asylum, and is causing great distress to expatriate communities. In the recent past, extreme anxiety over worsening human rights abuses suffered by their families in Egypt have been expressed by Australian Copts in peaceful rallies in Sydney and Melbourne.

As the largest and oldest Christian community in the Middle East, Copts have always been the targets of violence and discrimination. The abduction of Coptic women, forced conversions to Islam and forced marriages to Muslim men have caused extreme distress to Coptic communities in Egypt for over forty years, and have been increasing dramatically since the onset of the Arab Spring, and the Egyptian Revolution. Strict implementation of Sharia law discriminates heavily against non-Muslims and women, rendering Coptic women and girls dangerously vulnerable to abuse.

News of disappearances, forced marriages and forced conversions of Christian Egyptian women gained international attention in 1976 when Coptic leader, Pope Shenouda III, protested these gross violations, stating, *"There is pressure being practiced to convert Coptic girls to Islam and marry them under terror to Muslim husbands."* On March 16, 2004, he again focussed on this abuse, claiming that he had received "countless" complaints and reports of missing women which he urged the police to investigate.

The 1999 Freedom House report on religious liberty in Egypt confirmed his concern. Based on its fact-finding mission it 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”.¹

Since the Revolution and the release of Salafi and Muslim Brotherhood extremists from Egyptian prisons cases of abduction reaching Egyptian lawyers and Coptic human rights organizations have increased dramatically. The influence of extremists has contributed to creating a hostile climate in which abuse of non-Muslims is actively encouraged.

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, Adjunct Professor Michele Clark, of the Elliot School of International Affairs, George Washington University, and Coptic human rights activist, Nadia Ghaly.²

CEO of Christian Solidarity International (USA), Dr John Eibner, stated that the purpose of the report was to focus the attention of international human rights organizations, especially anti-trafficking authorities and religious liberty monitors, on the increasing abuse of Coptic women. It was also its intention to stimulate remedial action to prevent forced marriages which establish controlling, coercive and abusive environments in which women have been drugged, raped, beaten, deprived of their liberty, their families, and – in some cases – their children.

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 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”. This report stimulated acknowledgement from the U.S. Department of State whose 2010 Report into Trafficking in Persons stated: “*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*”.³

The Department of State’s International Religious Freedom Report also addressed this issue in

¹ Egypt’s Endangered Christians, A Report by the Center for Religious Freedom of Freedom House, 1999, p. 51.

² http://www.csiint.org//pdfs/csi_coptic_report.pdf

³ <http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2010/142759.htm>

2010, acknowledging claims that Muslim men were forcing Coptic women and girls into marriage and conversion to Islam. It commented that reports were disputed and often included inflammatory allegations and categorical denials of kidnapping and rape.

The assertion that cases almost never appear in the local media and remain unverified, without providing evidence of an honest attempt to investigate them, appeared designed to avoid a sensitive political issue without any regard for the truth, or the well-being of the victims. Moreover, the Copts, whose reflexes remain strongly conditioned by the age-old violence and discrimination that are inherent in the conventions of dhimmitude, (the subservient status designated to them under Shariah law) are intimidated by Egypt's Islamic authorities, and to downplay and depoliticize the plight of missing Coptic women and girls.⁴

Blaming the victim in rape and trafficking cases is a widespread cultural reflex in male-dominated societies, especially where accusations against perpetrators runs the risk of serious consequences. Police are usually reluctant to investigate cases of Coptic women allegedly being forced into marriage to Muslim men and conversion to Islam, and even known perpetrators are not prosecuted. Pursuing this issue is politically sensitive, as it clearly exposes the complicity of Egyptian police in criminal activities.

Therefore, CSI commissioned Michele Clark and Nadia Ghaly to undertake a second fact-finding visit to Egypt in November 2011. The goals of this second report were to challenge the dismissal of the testimony of victims as 'unfounded allegations', and to encourage the Government of Egypt and the international community to address the issue honestly and responsibly. The authors acknowledged that not all disappearances are abductions; that not all the marriages are forced, and that some conversions are consensual. Notwithstanding the ambiguity of many situations, they maintain that it is not possible to dismiss each documented case in the 2009 report on the grounds that girls willingly, and without being misled or coerced, left their families.

The title of the report, published in 2012, "*Tell My Mother I Miss Her*", is a direct quote of a young Coptic woman during a telephone conversation recorded by her father, which she was able to make to her family after her abduction. All the cases in the 2012 report are based on interviews with victims, family members, church workers and lawyers. All the cases have been reported to Egyptian authorities, are documented and authentic. The aim remains to challenge human rights activists and institutions, especially those whose mandate includes women's rights and people trafficking, to undertake further research into this form of gender and religious-based violence.⁵

The 2012 CSI report confirms the findings of the 2009 report, but the authors observed changes in

⁴ Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam*, Farleigh Dickenson University Press, 1985.

⁵ Clark & Ghaly, p. 1. http://www.csi-int.org/pdfs/csi_coptic_report.pdf

trends and patterns, all of which confirm that the abductions are pre-meditated. Key findings 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 (that that they are now Muslims)
- Minors and mothers of young children are increasingly targeted. Even if the mother returns to her family, the children's legal status remains Muslim.
- 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.

This report builds on the recommendations of the earlier one in seeking to guarantee the protection of minors, secure the cooperation of law enforcement in investigating all reports of disappearances; the prosecution of abductions, rape, assault, and urges the government to expedite the restoration of legal Christian status to young women forcibly converted to Islam. The authors believe that it is no longer possible to refer to the cases they have investigated as 'allegations', that they have been proven beyond doubt. They urge the Egyptian and international authorities to acknowledge them as criminal cases.

RECOMMENDATIONS to prevent and redress crimes against the Copts were developed by the authors in consultation with Egyptian lawyers and civil society leaders:

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 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, the legal age of consent.
5. The legal age for conversion to Islam will be raised to 18.
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, 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 defence 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 present in most cases of disappearance 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 “allegations.”

However, the Egyptian government and the international community seem to have distanced themselves from this ongoing abuse, and there is no record of the recommendations being implemented by Egyptian authorities. Detractors claim that abductions are fabricated, designed to deflect attention from the real causes of the disappearance of young women from their families. They assert that disappearances are the result of wilful young women seeking adventure, escape from oppressive families, feeling trapped in extremely conservative religious and social environments, or wanting more material benefits, better educational and personal opportunities.

However, evidence is mounting which proves that disappearances are organized and planned. In some instances, parents or relatives receive warnings of impending abductions. Lawyers, 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. According to another lawyer: “The abductors read people. They look for girls who are vulnerable. In many cases, the abductors are neighbours or family friends who know the habits and the vulnerabilities of the family.” If the issues are family hardships, inducement comes in the form of material support (or the promise of it). If the family issues are emotional, the abductors lure girls with the promise of romance. Victims who have not literally been abducted nonetheless did not consent to being ripped from their family or forcibly converted. They do not consent to a life of oppressive captivity, every movement supervised by a member of their new husband’s family. They have only agreed to friendship, romance, hope, a future, safety and security.

The transfer of power since Mubarak’s fall has failed to address the entrenched Muslim male supremacism that permeates Egyptian society which provides the cultural context for the increase in forced marriages and conversions. In this environment, sexual abuse and slave-like conditions are routinely denied to avoid inflammatory confrontation with entrenched religious bigotry and sexism, and the authorities – religious and secular – which support them. Coptic women are

disappearing from their homes, on their way to or from schools, work places and supermarkets, returning from church, picking up children from school, or visiting relatives or friends. They are held captive, physically and psychologically abused, drugged, raped, forced into unpaid domestic servitude, forced marriage and forced conversion. Even if they are subsequently reunited with their families, their lives are severely damaged. The trauma and anxiety caused to families who live in constant fear that a wife, daughter or sister will be forcibly taken from them, perhaps forever, is hard to overstate.

Contempt for non-Muslim women was horrifically revealed and recorded during demonstrations in Tahrir Square when journalists, Laura Logan (ABC News) and Caroline Sinz (France 3), were publicly humiliated and sexually violated – repeatedly, and with extreme brutality. The nationality of these two women and the high profile nature of their work guaranteed major media exposure and international condemnation, but the plight of non-Muslim Egyptian victims remains largely hidden and under-reported.⁶

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor has recently devoted more attention to abductions, without confirming it as human trafficking. With the upsurge of militant Islam, the Coptic community has become more vulnerable to persecution, and there has been a marked increase in the numbers being granted asylum in Western countries as the danger of abduction and other forms of abuse is more widely acknowledged.⁷ A 'second exodus' from Egypt followed the Maspero Massacre when Copts, peacefully protesting over the demolition of St. George's church in Aswan, were shot and crushed beneath armoured military vehicles.⁸

Egyptian lawyers, social workers and activists report increased disappearances. Four lawyers report a total of over 550 cases seeking the restoration of Christian identity following disappearances, forced marriages and forced conversions over a five-year period, with cases increasing since the beginning of the Egyptian Revolution in January, 2011. Another lawyer claimed first-hand knowledge of over 1,600 cases of Christians who had converted to Islam, and are now petitioning to have their Christian identities restored. 60% of these are women.

The abuse of Coptic women has recently been addressed by Western governments and some media outlets. On December 15, 2010, the BBC aired a documentary entitled "Christian minority

⁶ "Lara Logan Breaks Silence on Cairo Assault," CBS 60 Minutes, April 28, 2011

⁷ "Egypt's Embattled Christians See Room in America" by Lucette Lagnado. The Wall Street Journal. Saturday, December 24, 2011.

⁸ 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/

under pressure in Egypt.” 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.”⁹

On June 15, 2011, the US Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission) convened a hearing entitled, “Escalating Violence Against Coptic Women and Girls: Will the New Egypt Be More Dangerous Than the Old?” The testimony of expert witnesses revealed that there are thousands of Coptic women who have been abducted and abused, their basic human rights grossly violated with impunity. The Commission found that no abductor, before or after the Revolution, has been prosecuted, and that Coptic women have no protection under the law. Official complicity has served to encourage the upsurge in crimes of violence.¹⁰

According to Father Filopateer Gamil, of St. Mary’s Church in Giza, more than two to three girls disappear every day in Giza alone, and that cases brought to public attention are well below the actual numbers. Yasmin El Rashdi has quoted a parish priest who said, “There are no sizable attacks, but in this very neighbourhood 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.” [Photographic evidence substantiates the claim that the traditional crosses tattooed on the inside of the wrists of Christian girls are scraped off with scissors or burned off with acid by their captors.]¹¹

Commenting on the escalating violence against the Copts, international religious freedom expert, Nina Shea, said, “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. I think we can expect to see a major exodus of Coptic Christians from Egypt.....They are utterly vulnerable.”

This view is confirmed by Mark Ebeid, who links persecution of Copts with the emergence of politically powerful Salafists who believe strongly that converting a Christian Infidel is in some ways like earning a ticket to paradise – not to mention the earthly remuneration they get from the Saudis.

Motives for the Abduction of Coptic Women include:

Monetary reward:

⁹<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/pressroom/content/20111027IPR30446/html/Parliament-stands-up-for-Christiansin-Egypt-and-Syria>

¹⁰ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/pressroom/content/20111027IPR30446/html/Parliament-stands-up-for-Christiansin-Egypt-and-Syria>

¹¹ 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>

Lawyers of Coptic clients report that the families of the captors appear to benefit materially; are provided with new apartments or furniture, and unemployable young men are given jobs, indicating that abduction is well rewarded. However, not even wealthy Coptic families have reported receiving demands for ransom. The Copts are never offered an opportunity to redeem their captured women.¹²

Organized crime:

According to human rights activist, Magdy Khalil of the Middle East Freedom Forum, “Abducting and converting Coptic girls to Islam is not only a result of the paranoid and racist incitement against the Copts, but **is an organized and pre-planned process by associations and organizations inside Egypt with domestic and Arab funding** whose main role in seducing and luring Coptic girls is carried out through cunning, deceit and enticement, or through force if required. The government does not personally plan the abduction of Coptic girls, but it is a conniver and a collaborate partner which contributes to the lateralization of Copts within Egyptian society.”¹³

Coptic activist, Michael Saeed, also refers to a Saudi Arabia funded campaign of Islamisation of Christians in Egypt. ‘Egypt4Christ’, which monitors the abduction of Christian minors, published its latest report which exposes a highly organized Muslim ring headquartered in the Fatah Mosque in Alexandria, targeting very young girls, and involving high ranking officials as well as the Salafist leader, Sheikh Osama Borhammi, working in collaboration with other Sheikhs. The names and contact details of those involved were published in the report, including the name of co-operating Department heads and officers of the Alexandria headquarters of State Security, the name of the legal firm supporting the ring, and the location of places used to detain Christian girls.

The investigation also uncovered a systematic ‘religious call’ plan, where young Muslim males in high school and university are urged to approach Coptic girls in the 9-15 age group and manipulate them through sexual exploitation and blackmail, compromising and defiling them, humiliating them in front of their parents, thereby forcing them to flee their homes in disgrace, and seek conversion to Islam as a “solution” to their problems.¹⁴

Goal of ‘eradicating’ Christians:

As Islam allows a Muslim man to marry a Christian woman without conversion, (though the marriage of a Christian man to a Muslim woman is forbidden), there is no official religious necessity for conversions. It is widely recognised that this is a means of increasing the numbers of

¹²Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Egypt. CEDAW/C/EGY/CO/7. Forty-fifth session. 5 February 2010. Paragraph (45)

¹³“Who is responsible for abducting Coptic Girls?” Jihad Watch, August 26, 2005.
<http://www.jihadwatch.org/2005/08/magdykhalil-who-is-responsible-for-abducting-coptic-girls.html>.

¹⁴ Mary Abdelmassih (AINA)

Muslims at the expense of the Christian community. In spite of being repeatedly urged to do so, the Egyptian Government is reluctant to restore the Christian identity of women who subsequently return to their families, so they remain Muslim according to Egyptian law. Consequently, they are not permitted to marry Christian men, even within their own communities, and many remain single and marginalized.

Polygamy:

As men and women occur in equal numbers in all societies, the polygamous marriages of Muslim men will inevitably lead to taking women from non-Muslim communities. Coptic communities are thereby further reduced in number by depriving them of the children their captured women would bear. Instead, these women and their children become Muslims.

Impunity from prosecution:

The indifference of Egyptian authorities allows crimes against Copts to remain unpunished. Blaming the victim in rape and trafficking cases is a widespread cultural reflex in male-dominated societies, especially where accusing perpetrators runs the risk of serious retribution. In many cases, families report that the police would not file a report without a lawyer, which few can afford. It is not only the local police who are reluctant to take these cases seriously. In September of 2011, human rights lawyer, Stefanos Milad Stefanos, took fourteen open cases of abduction to the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior to request investigations, but there has been no follow-up to his report.

Under reporting

Cases of abduction are under-reported as Copts are often intimidated by Islamic authorities, and therefore downplay and depoliticize the plight of missing girls. The Coptic reactions to persecution are strongly conditioned by generations of violence and discrimination they have experienced as dhimmi communities under Islamic authority. ('Dhimmis' are Christians, Jews and other non-Muslims whose communities have accepted -usually under duress - Muslim political and social supremacy according to the norms established by discriminatory Shariah law).¹⁵

Coptic activists and families of missing girls have formed the Association of Victims of Abduction and Enforced Disappearance, and on the 29th of February, 2012, they staged a public demonstration in front of the Egyptian Parliament. The emergence of websites managed by activists document claims of disappearances and abductions. Clergy keep records of activities within their churches and communities and lawyers maintain their own caseloads, but cross-referencing with other sources is essential to keeping accurate records of missing women.

CONCLUSION

Abduction entrenched by 'Dhimma' regulations

One of the greatest difficulties in combatting slavery, slave-like conditions, and trafficking of women in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries lies in exposing and challenging the belief systems which sanction it and give it legal legitimacy. As tyrants are toppled, and Shariah law is

¹⁵ Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam*, Farleigh Dickenson University Press, 1985.

implemented in many nations in place of the hoped-for democratic and humanitarian reforms, human rights abuses are increasing dramatically.

Shariah law is based on the *Sunna*, the sayings and teachings of Islam's prophet, Muhammad, which are believed to be divinely inspired and therefore immutable. Whatever Muhammad did, Shariah law commands Muslims to emulate, and this has a powerful effect on the human rights and freedom of millions of people, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Muhammad's treatment of female captives, has served as the precedent down the centuries for Muslim men to use captive women for sexual purposes. This principle is clearly stated in the Quran (Q4:24) and has been repeatedly affirmed by legal authorities like Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, distinguished Fellow of the Islamic Research Academy of Karachi, who states that, "When women are taken captive their previous marriages are automatically annulled. It should, however, be remembered that sexual intercourse with these women is lawful with certain conditions".¹⁶

A dhimma regulation which incites rape and abduction of women is the rule that a Muslim woman cannot be married to a dhimmi (non-Muslim). If a married dhimmi woman can be compelled to convert to Islam, as a Muslim woman she will be considered to be automatically divorced from her dhimmi husband. According to Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, Muslim abductors and rapists of married Christian women evade conviction by forcing their victim to convert to Islam in front of two witnesses, who can sign a mullah's certificate confirming her conversion. If this is accomplished, the woman's former marriage is annulled and her abductor can freely and legally marry her.¹⁷

As Dr Mark Durie has pointed out, another relevant '*dhimma*' regulation is that a non-Muslim cannot act as a guardian to a Muslim. This has the practical effect that if an unmarried girl is compelled to convert to Islam, her parents lose all rights to intervene on her behalf, including the right to authorize her marriage or even to see her. Instead she will be assigned a Muslim guardian, and in accordance with the Shariah principle that a virgin gives permission to marriage 'by her silence'¹⁸ – in other words no formal permission is required – she can rapidly find herself married to a Muslim man, and her parents or guardian will have no say in the matter.¹⁹

However difficult it may be to combat entrenched, religiously sanctioned abductions and abuse, and the severe legal incapacity imposed on non-Muslims to defend themselves in Islamic countries, the suffering of countless women and girls underscored the imperative to make every effort to do so. In this age of multiculturalism and hair-trigger sensitivity to the demands of Muslims to protect Islam from critical analysis using intimidation and anti-vilification laws, it will take courage, compassion, and dedication to uphold truth and justice. Fortunately, there are such

¹⁶ Sahi Muslim Vol. 2, note p897

¹⁷ Patrick Sookhdeo, *A People Betrayed*, p. 210

¹⁸ *Sahi al-Bukhari*. The Book of *an-Nikah* (The Wedlock). 7:67:5137

¹⁹ Mark Durie, *The Third Choice, Islam, Dhimmitude and Freedom* p 165

people in positions of authority who are willing to make a take a strong stand in the media and in international human rights forums.

Appendix A

EXAMPLES OF CASES (names withheld)

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 was bored and she complained about being locked up and had asked her mother for permission to go to the supermarket, 250 meters from her house. She had been gone 15 minutes. Her father went after her but could not find 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 that time, the father learned of 4 similar cases of unexplained and unreported disappearances of daughters in his neighbourhood. He placed missing persons ads in the newspapers but received no response.

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 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 was 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 family'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.

The victim has called her father now 8 times, asking for help. She speaks to him of abuse and mistreatment. She is with Muslims and reports that she is beaten, imprisoned in a room, but 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.

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 rumour 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.

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 and 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.

Appendix B

(This recently received report is of very serious concern, as some religious authorities in Egypt seem to be trying to re-establish the religious justification for the documented trend of targeting younger girls, well below the current legal age of consent.)

Sharia in action: Egypt considering sanctioning marriage of nine-year-old girls

"The Prophet wrote the (marriage contract) with 'Aisha while she was six years old and consummated his marriage with her while she was nine years old and she remained with him for nine years (i.e. till his death)." -- Bukhari 7.62.88 Muhammad being the supreme example of conduct for Muslims (cf. Qur'an 33:21), child marriage is sanctioned by his example. So it is no surprise that Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt would be considering legalizing it.

"Egypt: NCW Rejects Marriage of Nine-Year-Old Girls," from Egypt State Information Service via AllAfrica.com, September 19: The National Council for Women (NCW) has expressed its profound dismay at statements made by some members of the Constituent Assembly in charge of writing Egypt's new constitution on the possibility of sanctioning marriage of sexually mature girls even if they were at the age of nine. The NCW described such viewpoint as a setback to child rights and is only expressive of outdated traditions still prevailing in the Egyptian society.