

**Forum on Minority Issues**

**Sixth Session (2013)**

**Item 4: Promotion and Protection of the identity of religious minorities**

*Statement delivered by the Delegation of the Arab Republic of Egypt*

Mme Chairperson,

Egypt has been synonymous with religious freedom and Peaceful co-existence for centuries and even millennia. Since the seventh century, Muslims and Christians have formed one social fabric. This deeply-rooted reality remains the case today, whatever the challenges may be. In fact all communities in the society became an integral part, and none of them, in past or present times, including Christian Copts, considered or consider themselves as "minorities", a concept, which in itself, is alien to the Egyptian society.

We would like to reiterate that clear evidences in the current rules of the International Human Rights Law, and the available jurisprudence and practice, suggest that the concept of "minority" is not of relevance to the status of Christian Copts in Egypt. Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), in which Egypt is a party to since 1982, necessitates the existence of a minority in the first instance for exercising the right contained therein. Also, the Human Rights Committee requirement of objective criteria for determining the existence of a minority, apart from size or numerical considerations, are most relevant to Egypt's experience. This is especially reflected in the fact that all Egyptian Constitutions, across the time, while guaranteeing religious freedoms and prohibiting discrimination on any grounds, including on the basis of religion or ethnicity or language, as well as providing for positive obligations on the State to that end, does not regard any community in society as a minority. Moreover, in applying the vital notion or principle of self-identification, we find that Egyptian society is not based on groups, as no community, collectively or through their representatives, including Christian Copts, proclaimed or sought the status of "minority", or considered itself as such.

Recently, squares and streets of Egypt witnessed, throughout the events of the 25<sup>th</sup> of January and the 30<sup>th</sup> of June revolutions, abundant images of Egyptians from different beliefs standing together for a common goal, respecting and guarding each other while praying.

That is not to say that no problems exist at all, but the Government is totally aware of these problems and different legislative and policy measures are currently studied and

**undertaken to deal with them, including those related to church construction, expansion and renovation, religious conversion, and incitement to religious hatred. These measures cover concerns of Christians, Baha'is and Shiites.**

**Prospects for the future include:**

**1 – Issues related to religious freedoms in Egypt continue to be at the core of the country's rich societal debate, involving State officials, religious leaders, legal experts, interested parties and civil society, among others.**

**2 – In addition to legislative and policy measures, initiatives aimed at promoting tolerance, such as the establishment by Al-Azhar of the "Family Home", as a forum bringing together religious leaders and prominent figures from all religious communities to discuss issues of common concern, have started to bear fruit. More is expected.**

**3 – Ultimately, the successful completion of Egypt's current political roadmap, where political parties and forces have made an unequivocal commitment to upholding religious freedoms for all, constitutes the best guarantee for the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms and ensuring non-discrimination.**

**I thank you.**