

Egyptian Copts Religious Freedom Violations Under the Rhetoric of “National Unity”

Dina Moussa

Department of Social Policy

The right to build and renovate churches and other Coptic religious edifices in Egypt has been a long contested issue that sparked sectarian divide and tension for centuries. In 2016, instead of issuing a unified law to regulate construction of houses of worship for the Abraham religions recognised by the Egyptian constitution, the Parliament ratified a law singling out the regulation of building of churches. This discriminatory policy solution, part of a long series of written and unwritten dogmas targeting Egyptian Copts, further widens the sectarian divide and directly violates the constitutional rights of the Coptic minority's religious freedom. This law is a manifestation of the inequality endured by the Egyptian Copts in a society where they are considered “lesser” citizens as opposed to

their Muslim counterparts. Under a national security driven policy agenda, lead by several consecutive authoritarian regimes, Egyptian Copts have and continue to withstand a mainstream rhetoric of inequality that is further perpetrated by the different actors in the policy-making arena in Egypt. Such an environment and disparity of powers complicate the political climate surrounding this issue. Roles of critical actors such as the state, especially local government, the church, and the media, among others, were shaped and in turn distorted by such pressure. Now, a year after the law was ratified, this research paper explores the roles played by the different actors and institutions that influenced both the formulation and implementation of this controversial law.