

Congressman French Hill
House Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations
FY2021 Member Day
Testimony
Thursday, February 27, 2020

Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Rogers, and members of the subcommittee:

First, thank you for including language in the FY2020 Committee report regarding efforts to ensure religious freedom and tolerance for Christian communities in Egypt, and for the opportunity to testify in front of you today about this year's request regarding the treatment of Christians in Egypt.

The report language I intend to request would require the Department of State to report to Congress on the steps the Egyptian Government is taking to ensure proper treatment and justice for Christian communities in Egypt. The report shall include information on Church restoration, Christian participation in government, a history of persecution against Egyptian Christians, and the status of Egyptian Christians being held in detention by the government.

My interest in making this request comes from my House resolution, H.Res. 49, Supporting Coptic Christians in Egypt, which has a diverse and bipartisan coalition of cosponsors.

My Democratic lead on H.Res. 49 is my friend and Foreign Affairs Committee member, David Cicilline of Rhode Island. My resolution currently has 71 cosponsors, including 25 from the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Grace Meng from this Subcommittee.

I introduced this resolution in the 115th Congress following a 2017 visit to Egypt, and while preparing for the trip, visiting the country, and returning home, I repeatedly heard about the plight of the Coptic Christians in Egypt.

Although the Copts have been victims of numerous terrorist attacks by groups like ISIS, what is most disturbing to me is the attacks against Copts carried out by their fellow Egyptians.

There is a persistent narrative in Minya province, located in Upper Egypt. The 2018 and 2019 State Department reports on religious freedom in Egypt mention

Minya Province as an area of concern more than any other in the province in the country.

Also, in late November, Ramy Kamil, a Coptic Christian and founder of a Coptic Christian Rights organization, was arrested by Egyptian police and has been accused of numerous terrorism related charges. He remains in detention. Unfortunately, cases like this in Egypt are becoming more numerous.

Egypt is a key partner nation in the fight against terrorism, and we are grateful for their commitment to Camp David and their cooperation with Israel to defeat terrorists operating in the Sinai Peninsula.

Egypt, however, is the second highest receiver of annual American military aid in the world, our government holds Egypt to a higher standard as it relates to our sustained aid.

I believe we must ensure that we uphold and protect religious freedom and liberty around the world, and as the gatekeepers of our federal spending, I request that the Appropriations Committee includes this report language in the FY2021 bill in support of that objective.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, I look forward to working with you on this issue going forward.