

**Congressman French Hill**  
**House Foreign Affairs Committee Member Day**  
**Written Testimony**  
**Thursday, December 12, 2019**

Chairman Engel, Ranking Member McCaul, and Members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to testify in front of you today about my resolution, H.Res. 49, Supporting Coptic Christians in Egypt, which has a diverse and bipartisan coalition of members that cosponsor it.

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 on the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

I introduced this resolution in the 115<sup>th</sup> 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.

Most recently in Minya province in Upper Egypt, in late November, a mother and her son were stabbed by a Muslim man while sitting in front of their home after being told that Christians were not allowed outside. Luckily, they were not killed.<sup>1</sup> Sadly, this is a persistent narrative in Minya. The 2018 and 2019 State Department reports on religious freedom in Egypt mention Minya Province more than any other in the province in the country.

Also, in late November, Ramy Kamel, 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. It is also reported that he has undergone “intensive interrogation” and has been given no legal representation.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, cases like this in Egypt are becoming more numerous.

Our country and our citizens over the generations have worked mightily to live up to the values and unalienable rights granted us by God above and enshrined in our founding documents, especially the vocal support of free expression abroad particularly in the form of advocacy for religious tolerance and freedom; the rule of law; human rights; education for women and minorities. These are fundamental tenets of our foreign policy.

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<sup>1</sup> *Morning Star News*. “Coptic Christian Family Attacked in Upper Egypt; Adult Son in Intensive Care.” Wednesday, November 20, 2019. <https://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/coptic-christian-family-attacked-in-upper-egypt-adult-son-in-intensive-care.html>

<sup>2</sup> Mbakwe, Tola. *Premier Christianity*. “Christian activist facing terror related charges in Egypt.” <https://www.premierchristianity.com/News/World/Christian-activist-facing-terror-related-charges-in-Egypt>

In this regard, I'm grateful that President Trump has prioritized this critical tenet by hosting the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in 2018 and 2019 at the State Department. In my work on this resolution here in the House I continue to give voice to this very American ideal of religious tolerance.

Likewise, I've met with religious leaders from all across the Levant from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Jerusalem with an eye towards better shaping American and allied support of Christians and other persecuted religious minorities.

This past February, Pope Francis together with the Grand Imam from Egypt's important Al-Azhar Mosque, issued a message on Human Fraternity inviting "all persons who have faith in God and faith in human fraternity to unite and work together so that it may serve as a guide for future generations to advance a culture of mutual respect in the awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings brothers and sisters."

This public coming together of Catholicism and Islam is a powerful statement to all governments around the world, but particularly those in the Middle East, to support religious freedom and religious tolerance.

I found this document signing with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar particularly important given the martyrdom of the 21 Copts brutally beheaded on a Libyan beach in 2015, and the suicide attack in 2016 that killed more than two dozen in the Coptic St. Peter and St. Paul's Church in Cairo, which I visited on my trip to Egypt in 2017.

I have great respect for Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, and I applaud the changes and message that he has made in the area of religious tolerance. He continues to say and do the right things at the top level of government. This includes having a good relationship with the Coptic Pope, attending mass on multiple occasions, reconstructing churches, constructing the largest Christian Cathedral in the Middle East in the "new" administrative center, and holding terrorists accountable for their atrocities.

However, I believe there is more to do, and as the second highest receiver of annual American military aid in the world, the United States Government must use the tools we have to hold our allies, like Egypt, to a higher standard if they are to continue to receive our aid.

It is in that regard, that I believe one vehicle readily available to this committee to highlight the U.S. government's concern of the treatment of Coptic Christians in Egypt is my resolution, H.Res. 49.

Let's recall President Reagan's admonition as to our responsibility: "Respect for human rights is not social work; it is not merely an act of compassion. It is the first obligation of government and the source of its legitimacy."

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