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Submission by



Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience (CAP LC)

CAP Liberté de Conscience is a secular international organization created in France in 1995. We monitor and combat discrimination and violations of freedom of religion or belief worldwide. We regularly inform the international community on these issues and develop constructive advocacy to put an end to violations of Article 18 of the ICCPR.

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Submission

Persecution of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light in Egypt

Since their implantation in Egypt in 2012, members of a new religious movement in Islam, self-named “**The Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light**,” have been the victims of state repression, social hostility, death threats by extremist imams for being considered heretics.

Arrests, inhuman treatment during police interrogations and their detention, prosecution threats on blasphemy charges and disruption of public order were the common characteristics of the persecution in most cases.

What is the community of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light?

The Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light is a Shia-derivative new religious movement founded in 1999 that finds its roots in Twelver Shia Islam. It has no relations with the Sunni-derivative Ahmadiyya Community founded in the 19th century by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad that is heavily persecuted in Pakistan.

The religious movement originated from the teachings of Imam Ahmad al-Hassan in Iraq but Egypt plays an important role in its history.

The faith community is headed by Abdullah Hashem Aba Al-Sadiq, an American-Egyptian citizen held by his followers to be the awaited Riser of the family of Mohammed, an eschatological figure who will rule the world on behalf of God. He currently lives in Crewe (UK) where he has founded a community of about 300 members.

Reasons of the persecution: divergent beliefs

The Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light has beliefs differing from mainstream Shia and Sunni Islam and has therefore been the target of discrimination, violence, and oppression in several countries, including in Egypt. Despite the country's constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion, their members find themselves marginalized and persecuted for peacefully practicing their faith.

In short, the members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light believe that

- the real Kaaba is not in Mecca (but in Petra, Jordan),
- fixed times for prayer are not necessary,
- headscarves are not mandatory from women,
- alcohol can be freely drunk if with moderation,
- LGBTQ people should not be judged or persecuted,
- all previous prophets made theological mistakes.

These and many other reasons exposed in their own sacred scriptures "The Goal of the Wise" explain why they are considered heretics, heavily persecuted in all Muslim majority countries and forced to flee their country of origin in search of a safe haven in Europe and North America.

They are also severely attacked for taking the 6-pointed star of David as a symbol of their faith. This has resulted in them being accused of being Zionists and agents of Israel.

Timeline: Some incidents of persisting persecution in Egypt (1)

The Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light appeared in Egypt in a time of anti-Shia climate. In 2012, Abdullah Hashem and his followers gathered in Egypt and established there the first Shia-inspired school in the country.

A popular TV talk show called "Al-Ashera Masa'an" then gave a platform to radical Sunni preachers who disclosed the school's location, incited to violence against the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light and called for governmental repression.

On 16 November 2012, their school, located in an apartment in Haroun Street in Doqqi, in Cairo, was raided by the police, while members of the faith were gathered for prayer.

The police confiscated the belongings of both men and women and divided the believers into two groups, one of Egyptian nationals and one of foreigners. Non-Egyptians were interrogated at length about the reasons they were in the country. Six foreigners, charged with violating residency regulations, and two Egyptians were arrested. Two days later, the foreigners were deported, despite protests by human rights organizations.

These incidents forced the Shia-derivative community to operate underground and to repeatedly relocate, with all believers risking arrest and the non-Egyptian followers risking deportation.

Over the years, the general anti-Shia atmosphere kept increasing in Egypt. In 2013, in what became known as the Abu Musallam incident, a mob of 3,000 radical Sunni Muslims attacked a gathering of Shiites, killing Shia leader Hassan Shehata and some of his followers.

In 2017, Abdullah Hashem and the majority of his disciples who were in Egypt had no other choice than to leave the country. Contacts with the co-religionists who remained in the country continued via their satellite channel and the Internet.

In August 2017, Hassan A., the senior coordinator of the underground community in Egypt, was arrested and interrogated. Detained in solitary confinement for over 24 hours without food, water, or a bathroom, he was then blindfolded and taken to a State Security building. There, amidst the screams of others being tortured, he was threatened and questioned about his beliefs and his fellow believers. Before releasing him after three days of detention, authorities warned him against revealing these matters, threatened him of imprisonment on blasphemy charges and disturbing public order.

In 2018, two Egyptian members of the community, Mostafa H. and Manal H. (his sister) were arrested by national security forces while shooting a short documentary film on the living conditions of children in Egyptian orphanages for their satellite channel. They were arrested and detained in underground solitary confinement with barely any light, no bathroom, and no access to any form of legal aid. Their whereabouts remained unknown for ten days. During their captivity, they were interrogated daily by intelligence officers about their faith, their leader, and the whereabouts of other members in Egypt. Eventually, they were released without any explanation.

In October 2023, authorities raided the residence in Al-Haram district where a number of members had relocated, hoping to escape persecution, confiscated their laptops and cell phones. They arrested seven members, leaving the children behind unattended. They took the group to a police station, where they insulted and beat the men, and verbally abused the women. After being mistreated and threatened with charges of blasphemy and disturbing public order, they were released but warned they remained under surveillance.

On 5 May 2024, the same people were summoned for interrogation and a court hearing for contempt of Islam, which according to the Egyptian Penal Code is punishable with imprisonment for a period ranging from five to seven years. They fled Egypt and went to Hong Kong where they are seeking asylum.

Discrimination, harassment and hostility

There are also several incidents where members of the religious community were harassed and discriminated against. For example, in 2022, Aboshosha and Mohamed H. faced severe challenges and threats at their workplaces, ultimately losing their jobs. The children of some members of the faith experienced bullying and harassment by their school peers. They were unjustly treated by school staff, barred from participating in examinations, and ultimately forced to drop out of the education system. Other members of the faith, such as Shaymaa and Asmaa S., were subjected to abuse by their family members: they were deprived of their financial rights and a piece of land was taken away from them by their brother.

About the recent support of the UN

The persecution of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light has been repeatedly denounced by NGOs (2) and by the United Nations. On 4 July 2023, three UN Special Rapporteurs, together with other UN officials, published a joint statement (3) where they stated that the refugees from that religious community face serious risks if deported back to their country. They also stressed

that the obligation not to send back asylum seekers to countries where they may be persecuted or killed is “absolute and non-derogable.”

In June 2024, reports on the persecution of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light were filed in response to the call of U.N. Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Nicolas Levrat, for input to his upcoming report to the U.N. General Assembly on institutional arrangements of States that enable minority rights to flourish.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Egyptian authorities

1. Ensure the full protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief for members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light, in line with their international human rights obligations, and take effective measures to prevent and combat all forms of discrimination, hostility, and violence against them.
2. Repeal or amend any laws, policies, or practices that discriminate against or criminalize the activities of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light and their members ensure that their members can freely practice their faith without fear of arrest, detention, or other forms of persecution.
3. Conduct prompt, impartial, and effective investigations into all reported cases of harassment, arbitrary arrests, detention, and other human rights violations against members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light, ensure that perpetrators are held accountable and that victims have access to effective remedies and reparations.
4. Provide adequate protection and support to members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light in the practice of their faith where they may face a real risk of persecution, torture, or other serious human rights violations.
5. Engage in meaningful dialogue with representatives of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light to understand their concerns and grievances, and work towards finding solutions that respect their right to freedom of religion or belief and their full and equal participation in Egyptian society.
6. Strengthen human rights education and training programs for law enforcement officials, the judiciary, and other relevant authorities to ensure that they respect and protect the rights of religious minorities, including the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light, and refrain from discriminatory practices.
7. Ensure that the National Council for Human Rights and other relevant national human rights institutions have the necessary resources, independence, and mandate to effectively monitor and address human rights violations against religious minorities, such as the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light.

Footnotes

- (1) For security reasons, the victims have only been identified by their first name and the first letter of their last name.

- (2) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/06/algeria-release-members-of-ahmadi-religious-minority/>
- (3) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/07/turkiye-must-not-deport-members-ahmadi-religion-peace-and-light-seeking>