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Chair

Mr. Scott Reid

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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•(1310)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)): Welcome to the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today, November 15, 2011, marks our seventh meeting.

[English]

We are discussing the persecution of the Copt community in Egypt. Today as a witness we have Mr. Nabil Malek, president of the Canadian Egyptian Organization for Human Rights. Ashraf Ramelah from Voice of the Copts is joining us from Allentown, Pennsylvania.

We'll start with Mr. Malek, and then we will go to Ashraf Ramelah.

Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): I'm sorry, I didn't want to interrupt the witnesses.

Mr. Cotler has a motion that he's having redrafted. He has given us a copy, but it will be substantially the same in content. I want to make sure you will assess the time allotment today based on the fact that we'll probably need about five minutes at the end.

It's my understanding that the NDP has a copy of this motion as well.

We'll need about five minutes at the end, after Mr. Cotler gets the revised version to us so we can approve it. This is a critical matter that needs to be moved so we can make it public.

The Chair: Let's leave five minutes at the end. That means we'll have to wrap up the questions at a certain time.

I'm assuming that everybody agrees with this.

Mr. Malek, I invite you to begin your presentation. We normally give our witnesses around seven minutes to make an opening presentation, and then we go to questions.

Mr. Nabil Malek (President, Canadian Egyptian Organization for Human Rights): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The persecution of the Coptic Christians in Egypt is a complicated matter. As a matter of fact, it has historical and legal grounds. The Copts in Egypt face swelling problems, obliterating their identity, limiting their progress and welfare, and even threatening their

existence. These problems include restrictions on their freedom of religion and the right to practise their religion, forced conversion to Islam, recurrence of attacks on their village communities and individuals, equality before the law, and political marginalization, discrimination in education and employment, as well as suppression of their culture. It has been noticed that under the authoritarian Egyptian regimes that have held power since 1952, the major trend for the Copts has been rejection and segregation.

I won't be able to cover all the restrictions and the massive attacks against the Copts, but I will give a few examples. Embedding Islam in Egypt's constitution as the state religion and the Sharia Islamic law as the main source of legislation in article 2 seems to have practically curbed if not outright negated some aspects of freedom, including freedom of religion, thought, and expression. Also, basing the state and its legal system on a particular religion seems to have negatively influenced the social environment, allowing the creation of different classes of citizenship and exasperating national discord between different faith communities and groups. It further undermines women's rights to equality with men.

I will give some examples. While article 40 of the Egyptian constitution stipulates that all citizens are equal before the law, and they have equal public rights and duties without discrimination on the basis of sex, etc., the Egyptian judiciary discriminates against the Christian divorcee whose spouse adopts Islam, mostly out of expediency to get a speedy divorce, by converting underage children born of the Christian couple to Islam. In addition, the children's custody is accorded to the converted parent. In contrast, if a Muslim parent converts to Christianity or leaves Islam and adopts no other religion, he or she must be divorced by law. In this case, too, the kids are placed under the custody of the Muslim parent. This situation creates a lot of problems and ends in massive attacks when such a thing happens.

In terms of equality before the law and the freedom of religion, practices belie both the text and the spirit of the constitution as well as international human rights laws. Furthermore, forced conversion of Christian minors when one of their parents converts to Islam is not only discriminatory, it is an attack on the rights of the child and on the foundation of the Christian family. It also presents, in this context, a serious violation of the collective rights of the Coptic Christian minority.

With respect to freedom of belief and the freedom to practise religious rights, which are formally accorded by article 46, Christians are faced with a maze of official discriminatory conditions when it comes to building, repairing, or renovating their churches, and sometimes their institutions. These conditions are administrative rules issued in 1936, and they have their roots in the famous historical restrictions known as “conditions of Umar”, which date back to more than 1,000 years ago.

All this creates a culture that the masses in the street cannot but follow. That's where the problem starts.

● (1315)

Of course, the conversion of non-Muslim natives to Islam has always been part of the Muslim state legal system. But today, after the revival of Islam in Egypt—which in fact began in the early years of the 20th century and has been emboldened over the past 30 years—forced conversion of members of the Coptic minority has been added to the list of violations.

One of the reports of the U.S. Human Rights Watch stated: “Pressure on Christians to convert to Islam...is sometimes accompanied by promises of jobs, promotions, wives and apartments.” Then it quotes a highly placed source in the Coptic Church as saying, “There are hundreds of these cases.”

In the same year, the London-based organization Jubilee issued another report related to this issue.

Another report, which is very important, was issued by the special rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. He referred to an appeal by another rapporteur regarding information on Coptic women who had been reportedly kidnapped and sexually assaulted by known Muslim groups financed by Saudi Arabian sources. According to this report, victims were reportedly subjected to continuous threats and rape to force them to convert to Islam and live with a member of the group.

In November 2010 a report by Christian Solidarity International and the Coptic Foundation for Human Rights documented 25 cases of these alleged forced conversions to Islam.

Regardless of the government of Egypt's claims that no force or coercion was used in most of the cases of Coptic young women's disappearances, conversions to Islam, and marriages to Muslim men, the facts—official and non-official persistent discrimination, persecution, and intolerance propaganda against members of the Coptic minority, coupled with the legal inequality before the law and the bias and the cover-up of such cases by the police and other institutions—do not absolve the Egyptian regime and its agents of such multiple violations of minority rights in Egypt.

Regarding inequality before the law, I can mention a recent case that happened in upper Egypt, in the city of Qina, when a Copt who was the only governor appointed by the old regime of Mubarak was replaced by another one who happened to be a Copt. The Islamists took to the streets and stopped the movement of the train from the south to north and vice-versa until this appointed governor humiliatedly resigned.

The ruling of the Supreme Council, which runs the affairs of the country today, couldn't do anything against these groups. That

doesn't look abnormal, though, when we know that no Copt has ever been employed in the presidential administration, the state intelligence apparatus, or as a police commissioner, city mayor, public university president or dean. The Copts in Egypt are excluded from all the high-ranking positions in Egypt.

Another important area that makes a schism, a division, between the majority and the minority is the parallel education system created in 1961. It is not permitted for any Copt to join or to enrol in this system of Al-Azhar University. All letters and sciences are in the curriculum, but the Copts are not allowed to enrol.

● (1320)

There are 500,000 students in this system, and thousands of them come from foreign countries to study for free in Egypt, while the Copts themselves are not allowed to enrol in these institutions. These institutions accept undergraduates who have a low level of achievement. They give them a better education separately from the public institutions where the Copts can join.

The Copts have a culture that is rooted in history, in millenniums. Their language was prevented from being used for centuries, in spite of many appeals to the government to create a chair for Coptic studies in one of the many universities in Cairo. Over the years we've been asking for that. This is also part of the Egyptian culture. There are layers in the Egyptian culture, but the Coptic culture is excluded from the history books and the rest of the culture of the country.

I come to the recurrence of escalation. Violence has been now taking a serious turn under the military rule, where we can see that such attacks coincided with the rise of Islam in the 1980s. Also, the pattern of recurrence confirmed that the political regime's manipulation of Islamic sentiments in the struggle against Islamists for legitimacy was a key factor. This is a very serious situation, because the Copts are in a crossfire with a regime that uses Islam to fight Muslim extremists, and the fight here is only for power. The Copts are paying the price, and it is very dangerous because it has gotten out of hand lately. And it brought the collapse of the undemocratic regime of Hosni Mubarak.

The Chair: I appreciate the importance of what you're saying. I should just notice that you're up to 13 minutes now, and we probably need to conclude your comments for the moment. Perhaps you could provide further commentary in response to questions.

Mr. Nabil Malek: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Let's turn now to our second witness, Mr. Ramelah, please. We would like to hear from you now, if you could.

Dr. Ashraf Ramelah (President and Founder, Voice of the Copts): Good afternoon, Chairman. Thank you for the invitation. I am honoured to appear before the members of the subcommittee on human rights to give testimony concerning the plight of Copts in Egypt.

The situation in Egypt concerning Copts is a little bit complicated, and I would like to clarify a few things here. First of all, there is no change of regime. Since January 26, the regime of Mr. Mubarak has continued. Technically, many of the military were appointed by Mr. Mubarak 20 years ago and they served him. The military that at this moment rules the country is concerned about its own interests and protecting the old regime.

January 26 was a great event for Egypt. Unfortunately, based upon the culture that started back in 1952 that was co-opted by Mr. Nasser, followed by Sadat and then by Mubarak, they increased the teaching of Islam in Egypt. Mubarak used to play good guy and bad guy. When he came to the United States or Canada or visited western countries, he posed as a peacemaker while he was putting oil on the fire and killing Copts, using his regime's police fascist system.

The discrimination against Copts in Egypt is over 1,400 years long and started back in 651, when Muslims occupied Egypt. The situation now is worse. I'm not trying to make a comparison with Mr. Mubarak's regime. Mubarak was bad for Copts and also for people against his regime. But right now the country is running without any control or any law. The system is going to protect Mubarak. This comedy situation of bringing Mubarak to trial is in bad taste. They are trying to tease the western countries by showing they have a new democratic system, but they do not.

At this moment, Copts are suffering more. I would like to explain what happened on October 9 against the peaceful demonstration of Copts that ended in killing, as reported in *The New York Times*, 56 Copts in Tahrir Square. If we look back, between January 26 and October 9, the Muslim Brotherhood as well as the Salafi Muslims demonstrated 15 to 20 times and the military never stood against them. It never oppressed them. It never attacked them.

The demonstration of October 9 was concerned with a church called St. George's, located in upper Egypt in a county called El-Marinab. This church, after various requests to be rebuilt—because there was danger for people who went there to pray—got authorization for rebuilding. But because of the doctrine of Islam that doesn't allow the rebuilding of a church once it is demolished or destroyed, they attacked the church.

The police stood there watching the attack against the church without moving a finger.

• (1325)

The Copts finally decided to protest, and ten days before they protested in Tahrir Square they were attacked by the police, and various protesters went to hospital. I believe three of them were killed by the police system.

On October 9 they moved from Chubra about 2.5 kilometres toward Tahrir with no problem at all. It was peaceful. They were singing Christian songs and carrying crosses. They were asking the actual regime to protect their right to worship whatever they believed in. But the Egyptian media started to charge the Muslims against the Christians, saying on the Egyptian TV and radio that they needed Muslims to go out to protect the army. Once the protesters reached Tahrir Square, armoured cars and tanks started to go against them with the intent to kill them.

I am in possession of various pictures of the tragedy that I refused to show to anybody. You can see people with their bodies cut in half. Whatever happened there at that time needs to go to the International Criminal Court against Mr. Tantawi. I hope, Mr. Chairman, you can bring this request to the Canadian government. We need Mr. Tantawi to stand in front of the ICC for what happened on October 9.

Copts in Egypt, like our friend Nabil, are still suffering from the invasion. They are still using the Umrani decree from the barbaric Bedouin law that does not allow Christians to have any rights. In fact, the word "dhimmi" that Muslims use a lot means a person who doesn't have any rights or responsibilities.

In 2011, I believe the world has to stand up and understand that there are more than 17 million Christians in Egypt suffering discrimination and persecution. The Muslim plan is to cleanse the Middle East of Christians.

In a couple of weeks Egypt will be holding an election. All the world believes that this will be a democratic election. I believe it will be another electoral fraud by Mr. Tantawi to keep his people in place to protect himself and his interests. In fact, at the beginning of this month there was a new article about the constitution explaining that the army is above any law. The army has to have all its financing and decisions, and no one, politically speaking—neither Egyptians nor the Egyptian Parliament—in the future can decide what the army will do.

A few things occurred after January 25. We see that there were various sharia courts in Egypt. They cut one of the ears off a Christian man, because rumour said he had a relationship with a Muslim lady. Another young man was thrown from a fourth-floor balcony for the same reason.

• (1330)

Finally, there was a 17-year-old kid named Nabil Labib. He was killed inside a school just because his Muslim teacher asked him to cover the tattooed cross on his right hand. Nabil refused to cover the cross. He was attacked by his teacher and other Muslim students. The only information that we have is that he ran to the bathroom and they followed him and after that they took him to the principal's office. Nobody tried to do anything. The ambulance arrived after one hour and took the dead body to the hospital.

Finally, just to indicate that the same regime of Mubarak is still working in Egypt, another Copt called Maikel Nabil, a blogger, wrote that he didn't accept the military regime ruling Egypt. He was taken into custody and on October 25 the current regime acted the same way as Mr. Mubarak and Sadat and Nasser. They took Maikel Nabil and they put him inside a psychiatric hospital.

What's going to happen in the future to the Christian Copts, God only knows. What I would like to ask you here is for the international community to be very active politically, economically, and maybe militarily against the Egyptian regime, and to protect not only the Copts there but also the other people who are against the regime, the secular people who are suffering.

There must also be control of the aid that Canada, the United States, and European countries send to Egypt, because a lot of this aid is going in directions other than where it was directed to go.

Lastly, I would like to ask the chairman about two ways of controlling immigration by western countries such as the United States and Canada. The first one is to generate a law to help Copts who would like to escape from Egypt for their safety. It also means the other side of this law has to be controlling who from the Muslim community is coming, so that we don't open our doors to those who come to our western countries with another intent, not to work and to find a better life, but to come here to force Islamization and sharia law in the west.

I don't know if I still have time, but I sense that I am out of time. I don't want to take advantage of anybody.

• (1335)

The Chair: You're actually out of time, but we appreciate that. You've actually taken exactly the same length of time as the last speaker did. Thank you very much.

We'll now turn to questions from members of the committee. We have five people on the list, but I assume we'll want all six on there. In order to accommodate everybody in the amount of time we have left, we're going to have very brief four-minute rounds.

We will begin with you, Mr. Hiebert. It's probably best to have one question and to indicate which of the two witnesses you want to answer it.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Am I starting?

The Chair: Yes, you are.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Thank you.

Thank you both for being here.

I've been led to believe that with the elections happening shortly, election observers have not been allowed or not been invited to participate. Is that your understanding? The question is for either of you.

Dr. Ashraf Ramelah: I don't understand the question.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Have election observers been invited to monitor the upcoming elections?

Dr. Ashraf Ramelah: No, they are not allowing anything. When I was talking about electoral fraud, this was the reason behind it, because if they're really looking to have a clear, pure election, why do they have concerns that any foreign identity can come and control the election.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Do you know, can you confirm, whether there are any parties running in the election, at least in part, on a promise to protect religious minorities?

• (1340)

Dr. Ashraf Ramelah: No, I don't have any official news about that. There are a lot of rumours. Various parties are playing sounds that they are going to protect the Christians, but I consider it the same as Islamic *taqiyya*, so I don't believe it, to be honest with you.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: As has been pointed out by Mr. Malek, there are constitutional protections within the Egyptian constitution. I'm wondering if you expect these constitutional protections to be upheld. Or do you expect a revision to the constitution after the election?

Mr. Nabil Malek: This depends on the result of the election. If the elections bring a majority of the Brotherhood and the Salafis, we will have a big problem. The future will be bleak for the Copts and secularists and women. We don't know where we're going.

There should be international monitoring. We still have time to do that. Canada has done monitoring for the Ukrainians and other communities by sending some Canadians of that ethnicity. So it could happen. It might be more welcome than letting Canadian-born or non-Egyptian Canadians go to do that. I think we should look at that.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: This is my last question.

You've both mentioned a number of atrocities or incidents for which prosecutions should have occurred. Can either of you mention whether these crimes against the Copts have been prosecuted by the justice system?

Mr. Nabil Malek: I didn't cover that because of the limitation of time, but all the commissions founded by this regime did not continue their investigations, and when they did an investigation, they did not take the second step of starting a prosecution. They were fake, sham investigations, all of them.

That's why they reoccurred many times. Many of the culprits haven't been arrested. They say that they don't know them or that kids set fire to a property and whatever. A very small number of cases over more than 30 years were brought to justice, and the sentences were very lenient and not according to the law and the constitution.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Marston.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Ramelah, thank you for joining us today. We really appreciate it.

One of the things I'd like to say is that in Canada we have 1.2 million Muslims. If you look at Canadian papers, you rarely see any of them having any difficulty. There have been concerns about whether some want to bring sharia law to Canada. By far the majority of those I've spoken to within my own community don't want it.

There are over 30 million non-Muslims in the rest of Canada, so I'm not overly concerned about a sudden change here. Having said that, we are very aware of the discrimination that happens in Egypt, Iraq, and Iran against Christians, particularly those in the Coptic Church.

I want to go to your commentary. You talked about one lad having an ear cut off. Under sharia law, if you commit adultery, and it's proven, you're executed. When you talked about the lad being thrown off the balcony for a similar offence and the student who was murdered, that sounds more to me like the vigilante action of people, as opposed to the actual application of sharia law. Would that be the case?

Dr. Ashraf Ramelah: Yes, sir.

Also, since you bring up the 1.2 million Muslims in Canada, I know there are Muslims around the world, outside of Islamic countries, and they live in freedom and they have all the rights as citizens of that place. But what happens when you hear what they say inside this country is that they are oppressed—

•(1345)

Mr. Wayne Marston: Excuse me, sir. Could I get you to answer the question that I asked? In those three particular incidents, were they vigilante actions or a sharia court?

Dr. Ashraf Ramelah: Street sharia court.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Did you say a street sharia court? I'm sorry, I'm not understanding you.

Dr. Ashraf Ramelah: That's correct, sir.

Mr. Wayne Marston: In other words, that's a vigilante action, as opposed to....

I spent time in Saudi Arabia in 1979, and I've personally seen some of the things done to people in the name of sharia law. In fact, I was there one day when a hand was removed. It's really horrific stuff, so I'm not trying to minimize it, but I am trying to be sure whether we have the institutional Muslim groups doing it through sharia law through their mosque, or whether we have it happening by people interpreting sharia law and doing it in a vigilante fashion.

Dr. Ashraf Ramelah: Well, it is Islamic doctrine—whatever you'd like to call it, you can call it. It is in the Koran and they follow whatever their book says to them.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Okay.

We know that some Christian denominations are treated worse than others. For instance, are members of the Coptic Orthodox Church treated the same as Coptic Catholics? Or are there historical reasons for this?

Dr. Ashraf Ramelah: I believe there are historical reasons for that. Also, Coptic Orthodox is a majority, more than Coptic Catholic or Coptic Evangelist or other denominations. You have to understand that Coptic Orthodox are about 90% of the Coptic population.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Malek, would you like to respond to any of that? I saw you nodding your head a moment ago.

The Chair: You have a very small amount of time.

Mr. Nabil Malek: As a matter of fact, there are cases where church buildings of denominations other than the Copts were attacked. Only about two weeks ago, a Catholic church had to accept the enforcement of the street vagabonds—who are groups of religious associations—not to put domes or crosses on the building. It's a culture. Please allow me to say that it was there, but it was suppressed to some extent by the regime of Mubarak because they used these people against the Muslim Brothers. The security apparatus under Mubarak used certain Islamic groups called Salafis and Sufis against the Muslim Brothers for political reasons. That's why now, after the collapse, they go out openly and do whatever they want.

The Chair: We'll now move to our next questioner. Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's quite an extraordinary situation that the Copts find themselves in. If they want any rights, they're bribed to convert. If they don't convert, then they're subject to persecution, violence, restrictions on the capability of having a job.... The list is really endless.

It would seem to me that one of the things that people who are mindful—certainly this nation—should watch is how the Coptic community in Egypt is treated. That would give us a good barometer of exactly how democracy is taking hold in any shape or form, considering the kind of long, systemic persecution of the Coptic Church—as one of our witnesses said, 1,400 years of discrimination.

I would like to have one piece of information clarified. I believe one of the witnesses, Mr. Ramelah, mentioned that in the incident of October 9, there were 56 Copts killed. In our briefing notes, I have 27. Is that correct that you said 56 were killed? And was it 300 who were injured?

•(1350)

Dr. Ashraf Ramelah: No, I am saying 36. Sorry for the misunderstanding. *The New York Times* and another newspaper bring the same number.

And the 300 injured, that is correct.

Mr. David Sweet: To both of the witnesses, I assume that you have very good networks in Egypt and you're in communication with them regularly. How betrayed does the Coptic Church feel now—Coptic Christians in Egypt—that they rose up in the “Arab Spring”, wanted to see freedom and democracy come to Egypt, and now they find themselves, as you have stated, with no regime change and, if anything, the circumstance significantly worse than it was before Mubarak was overthrown?

Dr. Ashraf Ramelah: This is my personal opinion. I believe the Coptic Church put itself in a bad position when the leader of the church started to play policy. This created a problem for the people in the street, because for decades they could not do any political activity because the church was doing this. In the meantime, the church cannot really do a lot of policy because they were under the gun from the regimes.

I believe the intention of Egyptians in general with the state revolution of January 21 was genuine and they were really hoping to generate democracy and freedom for all the people. But due to the culture, the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis ride the waves and they're more organized than the people, than the youth who started the revolution, and now we are in the middle of the ocean without any boats to take us in the right direction.

Mr. David Sweet: They may be organized, but do you see a significant number of moderate Muslim people in Egypt coming beside the Coptic Christians and supporting their pursuit to be treated equally, so that as we move up into these elections we'll see some pressure against those other groups and hopefully get some people elected who will bring some justice to everybody in Egypt?

Dr. Ashraf Ramelah: I don't want to be a pessimist, but I believe when you have a culture for 60 years or more, it is really hard to have change right away. Certainly there are Muslims who are secular, moderate, who believe in freedom and justice, but the percentage is so little that it will be crushed by the majority. The level of ignorance is very high, so when you hear an imam saying democracy is evil, 90% of the people who hear him will believe him, and they will be against anybody talking about democracy.

The Chair: Okay, we're going to have to end that question there.

We have a problem here time-wise. We have three questioners left on our list. We can all see from the clock that it would be very hard to wrap up five minutes before the hour and deal with three additional questions. We can all do math.

May I just ask a question from the members of the committee? Is there essentially a consensus about this motion that was—

An hon. member: Yes.

The Chair: There is?

We can all agree, therefore, right now to—

Mr. David Sweet: There's a friendly amendment, but I think we can do it within one minute at the time of—

The Chair: If you don't mind, can we do that now? I want to make sure that's done before we lose people.

The friendly amendment would be from yourself, Mr. Sweet?

• (1355)

Mr. David Sweet: Yes.

It is basically the last paragraph. It states, “And calls upon the Canadian government to...”, and I'd just like to insert the words “to continue”, because that has already been in the process.

Mr. Wayne Marston: That's fine.

The Chair: It's Mr. Marston's motion, or is it Mr. Cotler's?

Professor Cotler, is that okay?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): The amendment is acceptable.

The Chair: Okay.

Does this mean we have a consensus on this, then?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

The Chair: Good. That's adopted.

We now go to Professor Cotler, who is the next questioner.

I remind the members and the witnesses that they are four-minute rounds.

Mr. Cotler.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Sweet effectively asked the question that I asked. I may try to just recast it.

I want to thank Mr. Nabil Malek for being here. I've known him and worked with him for a long time. Also, I want to thank Mr. Ashraf Ramelah, with whom I appeared on a panel last week on minorities in the Middle East.

As I was listening to both of your witnesses' testimonies, I was thinking back to the initial hope of the Tahrir revolution, to the initial promise of the Egyptian spring. At the time, if we remember, Christians and Muslims stood together in common cause, where the army was looked to as the protector of the people, where this time the pain and plight of the Coptic Christians, as dramatized by the

most recent events of October 9, appeared as a betrayal of the promise of the Egyptian spring. The army has emerged not so much as the protector of the Copts, but as Ayman Nour, an Egyptian political leader, recently put it, there's no longer a partnership between them now that the blood flows between them.

My first question: Has the Christian Coptic community lost trust in the army, lost faith in the Tahrir revolution?

Secondly, should there be an independent investigation by the UN Human Rights Council, for example, of the events of October 9—indeed, of the plight of the Coptic community? Would you recommend that Canada call upon the UN Human Rights Council for that purpose?

So those are my two questions.

Dr. Ashraf Ramelah: I believe that the Copts certainly lost a lot of faith in the army, especially after what occurred on October 9. An international investigation needs to be done, not only an investigation in the United Nations, but I urge the Canadian government to make a motion to bring Mr. Tantawi to the International Criminal Court. No one could start whatever happened without an order from the high rank of the Egyptian army.

Mr. Nabil Malek: I second the proposition of my colleague. As a matter of fact, this is the request of the young people of Maspero, the Copts, because it was horrendous aggression. For your information, it was not the first time that personnel from the army attacked Copts. They did it in Imbaba a couple of months ago. They attacked people and they killed a number of Copts because they were protesting the demolition, the setting on fire, of a church in Giza, south of Cairo. There have been a number of attacks by the army on historic monasteries in the western desert, and all are documented.

We cannot stop the carnage against the Copts in Egypt unless there is a deterrent against the army, which is ruling now. When I say the army, I mean the council under the presidency of Tantawi. He knew about these things, but never investigated. As a matter of fact, he is not the one to investigate because he's accused by the church—and we have the documents—and up to now, more than six weeks, there is no word on who attacked the Copts of Maspero, though we have the videos of armoured vehicles flattening the Copts on the streets of Maspero. Who did that? We don't need proof; it is there. We can get all the documents from Egypt from lawmakers, the Copts, who have all the proof. We have all the evidence to bring the military council to international justice.

We ask the Canadian and western governments to uphold the universal ideas that we respect and live by here. We cannot accept less from Canada, our adopted country. History will say what we are and are not going to do here. It is time; otherwise we might see a genocide. A genocide is in the making, but in a different way. There are crimes against humanity, and I appeal to Canadians and to Mr. Cotler, the person who understands the law among you, and you also know that. So please do something before it is too late.

Thank you.

• (1400)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Grewal, please, you're next.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for your time and your presentations.

Could you please tell us how have the investigations into the attacks been handled? Also, as of now, what is the status of the 28 individuals who were arrested due to the clashes?

What are some of the accusations that the Egyptian state television station has made in an attempt to support their claims that the Copts had violently attacked the army and public property? How has the Egyptian community in general reacted to the accusations?

In the end, what can Canada and the international community do regarding this?

Mr. Nabil Malek: Thank you for the question. I will try to answer parts of this question, because it's a very large one.

If you looked at the press conference of the military council about three days after the massacre, they said they didn't know who the culprits were. The military council itself claimed they didn't know who fired on the Copts.

Let me tell you, I was in Egypt in May, and I am not living here mentally. I was prosecuted because I was defending the Copts and the national unity in 1977, before my immigration. I understand the regime very well, and let me tell you openly and frankly, this is a racist regime.

I accused this regime in my prosecution before the judges in Egypt that it is a racist regime, and we were going to take it to account, whether Canada does something or not. But it is an obligation on Canada to do something, because if they don't, Canada will be overwhelmed, swamped by immigration from Egypt. There will be an influx of immigration that will happen, suffering by the Copts.

Even if the election does something fancy, it will not...unless we have drastic political change in that regime and empowerment of the Copts inside Egypt to work with the secularists to support a secularist state down the road.

It is a long way off, but the Copts are very optimistic; they are not pessimistic. I sent a video, and the Copts are parading on the streets and ready to shed their blood in thousands to get their rights. And they're not going back. Their fear is finished. The blood they saw on the streets.... I cannot control myself because of the scenes we have seen. Please go to the YouTube on the Internet to see these shocking scenes.

The army can say anything and they call it denial—the policy of denial. I have tons of information here by scholars from Britain that I will leave with the committee.

We have a big problem, not only for Copts but for the western democracies. Please do something. Otherwise the whole Middle East.... Egypt is collapsing. It is not just an attack here or there; it is more than that.

The Maspero massacre is part of a bigger image. Again, it is not the Copts alone, it is the revolution, and to halt the revolution the

military council had to hit the Coptic minority hard to scare the majority. It is a very, very complicated issue.

Please, it is not just the Copts; it is the whole Egyptian history coming down now. Of course the Copts are paying a higher price because they are in the crossfire between Islamists and the interests of the regime. The regime is using Islam not for the love of Islam; everywhere in the Middle East they are using religion for legitimacy. But it doesn't work this way.

● (1405)

You can hear from the high military council that there are articles everywhere. The Egyptians lost confidence in the military council months ago, even before the massacre, because it failed in many ways. The council has its own interest. It's blinded by its own interest. The council is exactly like what happened to Mubarak. They were blinded by their own interest, and that's why they got in trouble. They deceived the most, and it seems like it's going to happen again.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm afraid that uses up the time available for that question.

That actually concludes our questions today. Before I adjourn the committee, I'm going to draw the members' attention to the fact that we have distributed a schedule. I don't propose to discuss it here, given time constraints, but it's in your hands now.

With regard to the two witnesses, we thank you.

Mr. Malek, we would be very grateful if you could leave the materials you referred to. We'll ensure that all members get the studies you referred to, if you give them to the clerk.

Mr. Nabil Malek: I would be more than glad to leave all of what I have. I sent a very informative video to the honourable clerk of the committee and a panel of the Hudson Institute. It's a very new panel of experts on the situation in Egypt, and the Copts in particular.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Nabil Malek: I can give you all my time and my support. Whatever you need from me, I will do, not for the love of the Copts, but for the love of Canada, which has opened up its border to me, and to my family and parents—and we have a huge family. I still care about Egypt as a Canadian. I have a responsibility to protect Canada before things get out of hand.

Thank you.

● (1410)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you as well to our other witness, Dr. Ramelah, who I incorrectly identified as Mr. Ramelah, but who is actually Dr. Ramelah. We're very grateful to you for being here.

We're very grateful to you, Mr. Malek.

The meeting is now adjourned.

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