



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

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

---

SDIR • NUMBER 010 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

---

**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, November 24, 2011**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. Scott Reid**



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

Thursday, November 24, 2011

•(1305)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)):** It is November 24, 2011 today and this is the 10th hearing of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[*English*]

Those of you who have items in front of you will see that we were going to deal in camera with committee business first. That would have involved kicking our witnesses and all the other people who have come to see us out of the room, doing our committee business, and then inviting them back in. It would also require more than the number of people we have here. We can have three members present for the purpose of receiving testimony, but doing any business requires more.

So I'm going to reverse the order. We'll do the committee business later on, when we have a full complement. We will start with witness testimony.

We have as our guest today Don Hutchinson, who is the general legal counsel and also vice-president of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

We're grateful to have you here with us today. We are in a smaller room than we were in last time. That's not a sign that we esteem your testimony any less; it's a sign of the fact that our returning forces from Libya are being recognized in our committee room upstairs. I think we all recognize that as a pretty important event.

We are, of course, continuing our study of the persecution of the Christian minorities in Iraq and Iran and the Copt community in Egypt.

Mr. Hutchinson, I invite you to begin your testimony whenever you see fit.

**Mr. Don Hutchinson (Vice-President and General Legal Counsel, Religious Liberty Commission, Evangelical Fellowship of Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and the committee for the invitation to inform your deliberations.

Although I am vice-president and general legal counsel with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, as the chair has noted, I'm appearing today in my capacity as chair of the EFC's religious liberty commission.

I will avoid reviewing too much history and information contained in media reports and focus on the current position of Christians on the ground in Egypt, Iraq, and Iran.

When asked last Friday to appear, we set into action the international network that would provide as current information as possible to the committee. I think it makes sense that I would first explain that network to you, and then talk about the countries specifically.

The EFC has 39 denominational affiliates. Anglican, Baptist, Mennonite, Pentecostal, Vineyard, and Wesleyan traditions, including the Salvation Army, are among them. The EFC also has over 100 organizational affiliates, including those that engage in support and advocacy on behalf of persecuted Christians.

The EFC is also one of 128 national alliances in the World Evangelical Alliance, which, along with the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, is recognized as one of the primary representative bodies of Christians in the world.

The EFC's religious liberty commission, which I will refer to as the RLC, is composed of individuals and representatives of organizations engaged with the persecuted church. They select their own chair. The RLC is in a relationship with the World Evangelical Alliance's religious liberty commission, which also relates to Advocates International, an association of Christian lawyers on the ground in over 100 countries, and several other WEA partners. We are also networked into the Religious Liberty Partnership, which is generally accepted as the largest global partnership of individuals and organizations engaging with and within the persecuted church.

First, I'll comment on Egypt.

The RLC produced a report on Egypt in June 2009, updated by a schedule issued in February 2010. I have a copy of the document here and will be forwarding it electronically to the clerk. That document includes recommendations to the Government of Canada.

The committee heard comment on Tuesday about the October 9 massacre at Maspero, when 27 Christians were killed and over 300 injured. This has created a new level of fear of the military for Copts and other Egyptian Christians.

The committee also heard about the brazen murder of 17-year-old Copt Ayman Nabil Labib on October 16 after he refused his teacher's order to cover his traditional Coptic-cross wrist tattoo and remove another visible cross he was wearing. Ayman was beaten to death in the classroom.

The destruction of church buildings continues in Egypt, with congregations forbidden from conducting repairs or rebuilding without approval from local Muslim councils or the national government. I will say that the army has rebuilt two churches that were damaged or destroyed in Cairo earlier this year.

Brian Stiller, the former president of the EFC and now global ambassador for the EFC and the World Evangelical Alliance, is on the ground in Egypt, and will be there for another two weeks. Brian and others have reported on the response to this anti-Christian violence.

On November 11, nine months to the day after former President Hosni Mubarak left office, Christians gathered for worship. Copts, Catholics, Evangelicals, and other Protestants stood side by side in a gathering of over 70,000 people at the Cave Church, also known as St. Simon Church, in Cairo to praise and worship Jesus, while millions around the world joined via the Internet. I have photographs of that event, which I'm happy to circulate for you to look at.

This was the largest gathering of Christians in the modern history of Egypt. The prayer gathering started at 6 p.m. and continued until six the next morning. The leaders of the churches led in collective prayers for the nation, for the healing of their land, for repentance from harmful acts they might have engaged in, and forgiveness for acts committed against them.

Scenes of Christians and Muslims praying together and protecting one another in Tahrir Square at the beginning of this year have unfortunately been replaced by restricted freedom. The Christians took a huge risk by gathering so openly and publicly in such a large way. Certainly they were in what's called "Garbage City", away from the centre of Cairo.

● (1310)

The restrictions have been occasioned by both military and Islamic extremists, who are excluding Christians and moderate Muslims from the political program. This situation has not been helped by continual reminders that Pope Shenouda III supported President Mubarak during the January uprising, essentially preferring the devil he knew to the one he did not.

The Muslim Brotherhood is proposing through its political networks to run candidates for over 85% of the 498 parliamentary seats despite an earlier commitment to run for not more than 40%. The military in turn is proposing to allow only 20% of the new parliamentary seats to be available in the election that begins next week. This parliament will shape the new constitution of Egypt.

A prominent Christian leader reports—and I won't be sharing names today—that:

There has been a distinct feeling by all Christians that they are a "minority" and should be more restricted in their rights as this is a Muslim nation.

He also notes:

Pressure by foreign governments to support Christians in Egypt often backfire and make proof to their Muslim detractors that they are a "foreign" element in Egypt, or worse, agents of foreign interests. So much better for let Egyptians in Egypt make their own claims and demands. There are some rare situations when foreign intervention helps, and in those cases we can let you know.

He concludes by encouraging appeals for the general safety of all Egyptians, noting:

It's the safety of the country which is more important—in its (Egypt's) peace and security Christians will find their peace and security,

Another prominent Christian leader from Cairo notes that:

...as the conflict between the demonstrators and the Egyptian army escalated and became extremely violent, we opened the church building to be used as a clinic to treat the wounded.

It is a confusing situation for us, to be honest. We are hoping for a peaceful election process, and yet are keenly aware that the new political parties are not ready for such a huge step and are unsure what the results will be. There is a general sense of frustration in many people, as we aren't seeing any of the promised changes taking place in the government or in civilian affairs. There is still so much aggression and abuse from the police towards the people demonstrating and now from the army as well. This all reminds us that we still need to continue to pray fervently.

Because the elections are coming up very soon, some of the more radical Islamic parties made a "power show" last Friday, trying to show the public their influence and their intent to impose their opinions on the new constitution.

We are also reminded that the relatively moderate Muslim nature of Egypt, attendant with its related human rights weaknesses, has been geopolitically important. In the election that begins next week, the rules on identity documents for voting will disqualify or discourage many Christians from going to the polls. The only Arabic-language Christian newspaper ever to legally publish in modern Egypt continues to publish, and the Arabic-language Christian Internet station continues to broadcast. However, both are at risk.

I close this section with the following from another prominent Christian leader in Egypt. He writes:

Thank you for sharing our difficult time.

We are passing through a dark tunnel of violence, feeling grieve of death and injustice. The light of forgiveness is shining with a painful love. Trying to bring forgiveness and justice together is a big struggle, but we are committed to the love that never fails.

We are hardly pressed on every side, yet not crushed. We are perplexed but not lost, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed. We do not lose heart and continue to work for justice to be fulfilled. We continue to love and declare forgiveness so the peace of God will overshadow all hearts. We continue to work on the healing and support of the innocent victims. And we continue to pray for the victims, for the offenders and for a better future.

Thank you all for your love, care, words and actions to bring justice and forgiveness together.

My comments on Iraq and Iran will be briefer, as it's more difficult to get into those countries for current comments off the ground on short notice.

● (1315)

The RLC also produced a report on Iraq in March 2010. I will forward that electronically to the clerk. That document includes recommendations to the Government of Canada. We are greatly encouraged by certain of the recommendations made at that time, which have been favourably received by the Government of Canada. The general lack of security for Christians results in continuing flight, either within or from the country.

In September 2011 a visit by a Canadian NGO accompanied by a member of Parliament and a senator took place. Back-channel communications came to us following that visit, and we have provided assurance that this was not a visit from a participant with the World Evangelical Alliance or the Religious Liberty Partnership, or, to our knowledge, an official delegation of the Government of Canada.

Moving on to Iran, we have not prepared a recent report on Iran. We note the number who remain in prison. Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani remains imprisoned and on death row, enduring physical and psychological torture. He's charged with apostasy because he had a Muslim heritage, not because he ever practised Islam prior to becoming a Christian. He's in solitary confinement and is forced daily to read Muslim anti-Christian literature while being supervised doing so. He has been beaten. He's allowed some phone calls but they're being listened to, so the conversations are limited. It is anticipated that his conviction on a new set of charges will be handed down by the Iranian court sometime just before the celebration of Christmas.

We also anticipate that with the Christmas celebrations, both Orthodox and traditional, coming in December and January, another wave of Christian arrests will take place. Last year over 120 were arrested during this time, one of whom, Farshid Fathi, has been held in the notorious Evin prison in Tehran since December 26, 2010. The 32-year-old is married with two young children.

We are reminded that in any conflict there are children. In addition to the issues of persecution that confront children raised of Christian-documented parents, there are additional risks and pressures for children of Muslim-background converts to Christianity who are being raised as Christians but are required to maintain Muslim expression and practices in their public lives.

In Iran, different from Egypt, it is believed that pressure from the international community is the key to Christians being released from prison and experiencing some measure of religious freedom.

As a side note, I observed that the report of this committee in regard to Sri Lanka has not been completed. Just this week I received communication from the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, whose executive director is also the chair of the World Evangelical Alliance religious liberty commission, about the situation in Sri Lanka, with the government's falling and elections now scheduled for December. I will also forward that electronically to the clerk.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Before we move to anything else, I'll just mention, Mr. Hutchinson, that the document you've submitted is in English only. I'm not allowed to circulate it under our rules, but the clerk will ensure that it is translated and then distributed. We have very efficient translators, so that should happen quite quickly.

Given the fact that we have 40 minutes left and we need a little time for committee business, I suggest we have six-minute rounds. We will begin with Mr. Hiebert.

• (1320)

**Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Hutchinson, for being here today. I appreciate your taking the time to inform us about what's been happening.

There are a couple of pieces of information that you shared that were new to me, and I was wondering if you could elaborate on them to whatever degree you can.

You mentioned, in regard to the churches that were destroyed earlier this year, that the army had returned to rebuild those churches. Is that correct?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** There are two churches that were destroyed in Cairo that have been rebuilt by the army. However, the Church of St. George in Merinab in Aswan province, which was destroyed by a mob of just over 1,000 people following completion of government-approved renovations, has not been rebuilt. The military government has ordered that local Muslim councils will have to give their approval in addition to that of the national government prior to rebuilding any churches that are damaged or destroyed. They've also made a request that the Muslim community identified as engaging in taking down the buildings be asked to make reparation. In the case of the St. George church, there's been an announcement made by a Sufi that the Muslim community would take action to restore it, but that announcement was made approximately two months ago and no action has taken place.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** When was the church damaged?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** That was destroyed in September.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** So the announcement came shortly after it was destroyed.

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** Very shortly after, a representative from the military government attended in the province and was standing beside a Sufi when he made the announcement. Then the military left. Nothing has taken place since then.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** Also, you talked about this gathering of 70,000. Where was that located?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** That was in the Cave Church in Garbage City in Cairo. It's a suburb of Cairo. The Cave Church is literally a cave hollowed out of the rock and from the main platform, or the elevated portion of the church building, there's no back wall and it just proceeds up a hill. That was a remarkable gathering. Brian Stiller, in a video report that was posted just yesterday, I believe, also includes some of the video footage from the event that was broadcast over the Internet.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** When did that happen?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** That took place on November 11 of this year.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** Okay.

Were there any signs of violence or protest at that gathering?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** At that gathering there were no signs of violence or protest. It was prayer, it was singing, it was worship. There was an unscripted ten-minute moment when the crowd was chanting across... It's unusual for the Copts, the Catholics, the Evangelicals, and the Protestants to gather together, but in such large numbers it's unprecedented. There was a moment when the people leading the service had to stop because the crowd was unanimously chanting the name of Jesus over and over again.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** Was the military present and providing any security for that event?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** To my knowledge there was no security provided and the military wasn't present, but who knows who was in the crowd?

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** Is it your understanding that at this gathering and at the other gatherings that Christians have contributed to the violence at all, or not?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** That's a good question, because to my knowledge Christians have not contributed to the violence. As I think I mentioned, the church in Tahrir Square, one of the main churches, was open to act as an infirmary over these last five days of rioting that took place. Doctors were housed there.

Certainly during the Tahrir Square riots in January, the Christians initiated the period of time when they surrounded the Muslims while they were engaged in prayer for their protection, and then the Muslims reciprocated. The Christian churches in Tahrir Square also opened so that the Muslims could perform ablutions, ceremonial washing, prior to their times of prayer.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** This is before our committee called on the government to tie Canadian aid to the human rights records of these nations, and I just wanted to point out for the record that I spoke with the minister for CIDA. She indicated that the Canadian government does not give any funds to other governments. Any resources the Canadian government does provide—for example, for food security and for those sorts of things—go directly to aid agencies. That's why the funding is rarely, if ever, withdrawn, because it would simply harm the people who need it the most.

Other than that suggestion, can you think of any other suggestions that the Government of Canada should consider as to how to respond to the situation in Egypt, keeping in mind there is an interim government? Even the military itself is very interim. Who do you negotiate with? Who do you try to set agreements with? These are the questions that come to my mind.

Do you have any suggestions?

• (1325)

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** My report has been inadvertently taken to the clerk. I assume that is what the chair has referred to in receiving the report in English.

The recommendations are actually contained in that document. It would help me a lot if I had it back.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** Mr. Chair, he's asking for his document.

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** I'm sorry; my apologies. I believed the document that was removed—I was only sending around the pictures—

**The Chair:** That's all we took, actually. The report I have up here is the one you circulated earlier.

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** Oh, okay. Then I flipped it over down here on the bottom. I'm entirely responsible.

**The Chair:** It's all about avoiding blame.

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** I've just accepted blame, Mr. Chair.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** The call, the mention on the ground, was a general human rights call rather than specifically identifying Christians. The deliberations of this committee I hope will inform the operations of the office of religious freedom when it's established. The collected wisdom of this room will hopefully reflect on Egypt as well and on the need for us, in bilateral and multilateral conversations, to engage in what are sometimes difficult conversations about human rights, including the right to religious freedom.

On the aid question, people who are in need should not go without because of the record of their government. However, there are opportunities to engage in conversations with governments about their human rights behaviour in relation to the provision and delivery of aid, and in the work that's done with aid organizations. Certainly those are opportunities that I think the Government of Canada could consider.

Also recommended in the report was to call upon the Government of Egypt—this is an ideal time, when they're forming a new constitution—to place a high priority on the rule of law, respect for religious freedom, and respect for international documents.

Currently in Egypt, any international documents that the government has acceded to, or has physically signed, are brought into Egypt with a provision in the current constitution that they will be complied with only insofar as they do not abrogate sharia law. The sharia law provisions often set aside significant components of the United Nations agreements that are signed or acceded to by Egypt.

There's also a continuing law from the 19th century that prohibits the building of new churches except in isolated circumstances. So essentially, the church buildings that are being destroyed and rebuilt in Egypt today, or being destroyed with the hope that they will be rebuilt, are buildings that in Canada would be considered historic landmarks.

Also, one thing that is key and missing from the history books in Egypt and the education of the nation is any reference to the Coptic history of the country. Egypt was a Christian-majority nation at one point in time, and it's a significant part of their heritage. Simply being aware of that might create a greater respect for the Coptic and the other Christian communities that exist in Egypt.

It's also vital to develop relationships with the local religious leaders who are on the ground. Canadian diplomats who do so do themselves and those on the ground a great favour, because they're more greatly informed as to what's taking place just outside their door.

• (1330)

**The Chair:** I'm actually going to have to stop you at that point, because we've almost doubled the amount of time we allow for these things. But I suspect you'll be able to return to those points when answering some other questions.

We go now to Mr. Marston.

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You referred to a delegation that went to Iraq, and that would be One Free World International. I am aware of this because I was invited to go with that delegation. For a number of reasons I couldn't go, but at the time I was giving it serious consideration.

I sense from the way you characterized it...and maybe I misread you, which is why I want to give you the opportunity to clarify. Reverend El Shafie from that organization was before this committee. I must say that on the matters of fact that you put out there today about the situation in Egypt, his testimony was almost identical. He went through the dates and times and the various attacks that took place.

Was I misreading, or were there any problems you saw with that delegation going?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** There are conversations that take place with international governments through delegations from the World Evangelical Alliance, from representatives within the Religious Liberty Partnership. Those conversations are of an ongoing nature. There are also, I suspect, conversations that go on between the Canadian government and the Government of Iraq, which I also imagine are ongoing.

The question that was addressed was that this was not a delegation from the World Evangelical Alliance, nor the Religious Liberty Partnership, nor, to our knowledge, an official delegation from the Government of Canada. There's nothing to be read into that.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** No, I just wanted to clarify that, because the reverend gave very passionate testimony to this committee. If there had been a concern, I wanted to give you the opportunity to put it on the table. I'm glad to hear otherwise.

You mentioned the rebuilding of two churches in Cairo. When you gave your testimony, you also spoke about a crackdown from the military. Maybe I misunderstood, but did you say that the churches weren't completed, that they weren't rebuilt?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** Two churches in Cairo were rebuilt. It's the St. George church that has not yet been rebuilt.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** That's the third one, then.

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** That's correct.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** That brings me to ask the question that gives a kind of a sense that the military, in some small sense, was trying to be helpful; whether it was because they were culpable before or not, that's an entirely different thing.

We see the western newscasts of what's going on in Egypt right now, the people rallying one more time, and there are clearly problems with how the military has conducted itself overall. They literally took away Mubarak, who is the figurehead to some extent, but the same structure is in place.

Do you see that changing? We have elections that are supposed to take place, if they go ahead. Do you see the military stepping aside? And if that were to occur, what would be the potential impact on the Christian community? Even a semblance of support is better than none.

Further on that, some of the attacks, to my mind, sound almost like a vigilante group is doing it. You talked about how Muslims and Christians in some gatherings protect one another, which I'm pleased

to hear. Would you say there's a small segment of people who are actually doing the damage as opposed to the Muslim community as a whole?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** The churches that were rebuilt by the military were rebuilt prior to October 9. What's been called the massacre at Maspero took place on October 9. There the military killed 27 Christians, with over 300 injured, in a peaceful assembly that was broken up using the full force of the government.

That has created a fear of the military that has escalated. Previously the military was regarded as continuing the standard of care, as it were, for Christians that had existed under the Mubarak government and up until that point in time. The issue of elections was resolved this morning by an agreement between the military and the Muslim Brotherhood. They've agreed to end the public displays by the Muslim community and to proceed with the elections next week.

What remains unclear is whether the full 498 seats of the Parliament will be up for election or whether it will be only 20% of them. The last statement released by the military was that they felt that there was a need to graduate the elections for the assembly to avoid one sect or another gaining control of the constitution on the first round of elections.

The confusion that reigns in that setting is difficult for us as Canadians to understand—the election will begin next Friday and it won't conclude until next March. It's during the time between next Friday and the end of March that there will be continued negotiations to decide how many of the parliamentary seats will be available.

The Muslim Brotherhood has through a network of alliances established candidates to run in 85% of those seats. They had said that they would run in only 40% of those seats so that they would not gain control of the Parliament. That's put the military in a difficult position. It's put the people of Egypt in a difficult position. When people go to vote, they are required to produce documents of citizenship that say whether they are a Christian or a Muslim or members of some other religion. So Christians are already fearful of voting.

● (1335)

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** That was indicated by the testimony here.

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** They're not only fearful; they are concerned that showing up with documents identifying them as Christians may actually have them turned away, even if they have the courage to go to the voting booth.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** Unfortunately, I'm out of time.

**The Chair:** Sorry about that.

We'll go to Ms. Grewal.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC):** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Mr. Hutchinson.

What are the major factors contributing to the limited religious freedom for Christians, whether it's in Iraq, Iran, or Egypt? Could you please tell us?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** In many countries around the world, there are severe limitations on religious freedom. An organization called Open Doors, which is affiliated with us, produces an annual world watch list, as does the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. The Open Doors list identifies the worst of the offending countries as being primarily those that are ideologically based. They have an ideological predisposition that is anti-religious. We can consider China to be one of those countries.

There are countries in which there are religious majorities, and the religious majority is engaged in the government of the state. There are Muslim-majority countries. There are Buddhist-majority countries in that category. The primary animus is an animus that opposes another religious community.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** I see.

Is there a long-term history of persecution of Christians in these countries?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** Unfortunately, there is in some of them. In others there is not. However, it depends on when the ideological or governmental shift in leadership took place. What is clear is that today, the largest group of persecuted religious individuals on the planet are Christians. The estimates now are that between 200 million and 250 million Christians face persecution on a daily basis around the globe. Recent studies done by the Pew Forum and Penn State university indicate that approximately 170,000 Christians are killed annually, purely and simply because of their faith belief.

• (1340)

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** You mean that discrimination is institutionalized. Is that what you mean to say?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** In some instances, it is in fact institutionalized. I referenced the letter in regard to Sri Lanka earlier, since we've gotten broader than just the three countries.

In Sri Lanka, the government has intentionally chosen to recognize only the Roman Catholic church and a council of Protestant churches, which does not include the evangelical churches of Sri Lanka. The evangelical churches comprise about half the number of Protestants in the country. Therefore, there's a huge question. And for the first time ever, the Roman Catholic representative in Sri Lanka has indicated agreement with the government's decision.

Now, I understand that they would like to protect the Roman Catholic citizens in Sri Lanka from the type of persecution they have experienced. However, we'll be taking it up, as you might imagine, with the papal nuncio, and going to the Vatican. We just issued in June of this year a document entitled *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*, which was jointly produced by the Vatican, the World Council of Churches, and the World Evangelical Alliance. It had very significant review before it was released publicly.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** What can the Government of Canada and other governments and international bodies do better to identify and address the problems of discrimination against Christians in these countries?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** We have endorsed the concept of developing an office of religious freedom. We have made a full submission on what we would hope would be a robust office that

would help inform the policies of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in establishing best practices for diplomats and for diplomatic engagement. Such an office, we hope, would help to inform the department so that in our bilateral and multilateral trade conversations, these human rights issues would be key.

We're hoping that it will also inform, as intended, Citizenship and Immigration Canada so that best practices and awareness of the religious situation in different nations will be something immigration officers, border service agents, and the Immigration Review Board are aware of and take into consideration in the screening process.

In United Nations camps, Canadians are often screening people who are seeking refugee status because of religious persecution. However, the people the government hires to do the screening in those camps are part of the majority community that is persecuting Christians. So the screening process may be unjust.

We've made a number of proposals in regard to the office of religious freedom.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** Mr. Chairman, do I have some time left?

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** Okay, that's fine.

**The Chair:** It actually gives me a chance, if you don't mind, to do a quick follow-up on something Ms. Grewal had raised and was given a partial answer to.

You mentioned a total number of approximately 200 million to 250 million Christians persecuted on a more or less daily basis. Then you mentioned a university where a record is kept of this. That's...?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** It's Penn State university. I know the authors are Grim and Finke, but I forget which one is with the Pew Forum and which one is at Penn State university. Last December they published the book *The Price of Freedom Denied*, which is an examination of religious freedom on the face of planet earth today. In that book, they indicate the documented figures I've referenced.

**The Chair:** That's very helpful; that's the reference we need.

Let's go to Professor Cotler.

**Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate your presence and the information you provided to us.

Mr. Hutchinson, you may know the case of Maikel Nabil, a 26-year-old blogger in Egypt. He is one of the early leaders of the Tahrir revolution and one of the early advocates for the Egyptian "Arab Spring", who initially coined the phrase we hear now revisited with the demonstrations, that the army and the people are "of one hand". At the time, he felt that the army and the people were working together and helped to bring common demonstrations between Christians and Muslims in Egypt. He himself is a Christian Copt.

But last March, when he felt the army was turning against the people, he made a statement that the army and the people were no longer of one hand. For that, he was charged with insulting the Egyptian military, brought before an Egyptian military tribunal, convicted, and sentenced to three years in prison.



That process, like all processes before the Egyptian military tribunals, was devoid of any legality. There was no presumption of innocence. Ninety-three percent of those who have been brought before that tribunal have been convicted, with no right of appeal, no right to independent counsel, etc. As I am speaking with you today, Mr. Nabil is in the 91st day of a hunger strike, his life hanging by a thread.

My questions to you are the following. Are you or your organization aware of this case, and if so, have you taken it up? If you have taken it up, do you believe that his being a Christian Copt has had any relationship to the charges and imprisonment?

Finally, are you aware of other Christian Copts who have been brought before the Egyptian military tribunal—which, as I say, is a process devoid of any legality—and if so, has their being a Christian Copt been related to their being brought before the tribunals?

• (1345)

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** Mr. Chair, those are very good questions. It's a strong series of questions.

I'm familiar with Mr. Nabil's situation. There are members of the Religious Liberty Partnership who are engaging on his behalf. The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada is not directly engaging, and I'm not clear as to whether members of the EFC religious liberty commission are directly engaging or whether it's through the partnership network. But there is engagement on the issue.

I'm being asked to speculate whether Mr. Nabil's being a Coptic Christian contributed to his arrest and imprisonment. Certainly we would like to see him free. Certainly on a freedom of expression basis we would see that he doesn't belong in prison. However, it's difficult to assess the difference between somebody being falsely convicted because they've criticized the military in a military regime and being falsely convicted because they've criticized the military and they're also a Coptic Christian.

I can't put my headspace inside the headspace of the military tribunal to assess whether or not they've made that type of an assessment.

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** Are you aware of any other Christian Copts who...? So far, close to 12,000 in the post-Mubarak era have been brought before the military tribunal, of whom 93% have been found guilty, reversing any notion of presumption of innocence. I'm just wondering whether there are Christian Copts amongst them, to your knowledge. If so, is there a connection to the fact that they are Christian Copts?

From my own appreciation of Maikel Nabil's case, I don't believe that his being a Christian Copt related to his imprisonment. That's why I am asking you if there is any other suggestion, by reason of the number or nature of Christian Copts being brought before the tribunal and being charged and imprisoned.

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** I'm aware that other Christians have been detained and imprisoned. I'm not certain whether they've appeared before the particular tribunal that deals with charges of engaging in operations against the current military rulership of Egypt.

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Professor.

We'll go now to Mr. Sweet.

• (1350)

**Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Hutchinson, for being here and for the good work that the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada does.

Please relay to Mr. Stiller when you communicate with him that he will certainly be remembered in the prayers of those who are faithful to praying here and hope that he be kept safe and not find himself in a situation that can easily explode in Egypt.

One of the things we should establish here is that although murder and mass murder were not common in Egypt, the persecution of Christians was common before this uprising. They are identified differently in the country, and there are limitations put upon them as far as employment and property, etc. Is that correct?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** It is a correct assumption that Christians are subject to different treatment, which we would describe as persecution.

I referenced earlier that this report will be sent electronically to the clerk so it can be shared with the committee once it is translated. If it had been translated I would have brought copies.

I certainly appreciate the expression of concern for Dr. Stiller. He surprised me with the video he posted yesterday. Because of our communications until that time, I would not have mentioned his name here.

**Mr. David Sweet:** For those of us who know Mr. Stiller, he's usually full of surprises.

How many churches in the last year have been destroyed in Egypt? Do you have a count on that?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** The three churches that have been completely destroyed since the uprising in January commenced are the ones I've mentioned: the two in Cairo, and the St. George church in Merinab in Aswan province.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Is damage to houses of worship uncommon in Egypt?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** Damage to houses of worship has taken place in the past in more limited numbers than in this past year. There has been a general sense of respect for the places of worship among the different religious communities.

One of the great concerns is the effort on the part of extremists to make a political statement. That political statement is being made through attacks on a minority religious community as a display of strength.

**Mr. David Sweet:** The statement that you're talking about, was that the statement recorded in the media that the Muslim Brotherhood has said that no churches should be built or rebuilt?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** No. I was referencing one of the statements I had read today that we'd gathered in the last six days from someone on the ground in Egypt.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Okay. I saw the media reports, and I was just wondering if you had some way of confirming that.

Reverend El Shafie was here, and he made a statement that he regarded the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization. Would you characterize them as that?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** I'll premise this by stating that one of the principal differences between Reverend El Shafie and me is that I'm a lawyer, so my understanding of the definition of a terrorist organization might be different from his.

To my knowledge, the Muslim Brotherhood has never been categorized as a terrorist group by a western nation, and would therefore land outside of that definition. The Muslim Brotherhood, however, is a political expression that is, by their own admission, tied to a more extreme expression of Islam than the understood majority of the population of Egypt.

• (1355)

**Mr. David Sweet:** Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Sweet.

[Translation]

Ms. Pécelet, you have the floor.

**Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to understand certain things clearly. I read certain newspaper articles. For instance, I read an article about a girl who was beaten in the street by a Christian woman. In addition, other persons report that the army, the police and the Ministry of the Interior are sending people out into the streets to sow panic whenever they want to.

Can you tell me precisely whether the government itself is responsible for these acts, ultimately? Is the government held responsible for these things, or are we simply witnessing a rivalry between the religious groups in the country, such as we saw in Lebanon? Are the Christians and Muslims really at odds?

Can you tell me who is behind these acts, and how we can tell the difference? Or is it really the government, ultimately, that is responsible for these acts because of its more radical position?

[English]

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** That's another very good question.

What's taking place on the streets in Egypt is coming to us through a variety of news sources and reports, including social media. Some violence by larger groups is being attributed to predominantly Muslim extremist groups, and some to the military. Reports of that violence have been documented largely through video, in addition to the spoken word, or through other photographs that provide visual identifiers of those who are engaging in the harmful actions.

The word we have, as I shared earlier, seems to indicate that it's more a display of power taking place now between Muslim extremists and the military, which currently controls the government as an election period approaches. I would note that there were historic differences between faith communities, but very rarely had they escalated to the level of frequency or volume of violence that's taking place now.

[Translation]

**Ms. Ève Pécelet:** I have a brief question.

Since you are a lawyer I would really like to speak to you about... We hear about violence in the streets. Is there also discrimination against the Christians in legislation as such? For instance, regarding family law, I read that when a Christian marries a Muslim, the act does not apply to both in the same way. Do they have the same rights? Are they subject to discrimination, for instance, in the public service? Since their birth certificate shows whether they are Christian or Muslim, is there discrimination when someone is applying for a job, for instance, or attempting to access certain services?

And with regard to how the law is applied in the courts, we also hear that certain groups have made representations to the government, complaining that these actions are never punished. Do Christians turn to the courts or not, knowing that the courts apply legislation that makes them unequal to Muslims?

I am simply trying to understand the scope of the marginalization of the Christian groups—aside from the violence they are subjected to—in general, in society.

• (1400)

[English]

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** There is an inequality constitutionally and legally for Christians in Egypt. The constitution contains an overriding provision in regard to sharia law.

Certainly there is evidence that where there is an accepted conversion to Christianity, which is rare, we do engage in trying to secure the safety of those who convert to Christianity of their own free will.

But where there is a successful conversion and a marriage to a Christian woman takes place subsequently, then it's recorded as a Muslim marriage and all children of the marriage are considered to be Muslim as well. There are a number of inequalities in the law in that regard.

As to the violence that's taking place and who is standing where on those issues, we remain in the position of a nation that is experiencing a measure of instability under military control, heading into an election where even the seats available are undetermined and uncertain. So it really is a period of substantial instability where the international community has an opportunity to engage in peaceful relationships and peaceful offers to assist in oversight, particularly in this nation that is so key to the politics of the Middle East. We should be giving serious consideration to that.

For more detail, I would hope that the report, when it's translated, will be of assistance to you, because some of those issues are addressed there.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're basically out of time here. We have to do a very small amount of organizational work.

That said, I am going to ask for the indulgence of the committee and ask just one question of a more global nature.

Just returning to the global number of 250 million Christians persecuted worldwide, I suppose to some degree that's simply an artifact of the fact that there are more Christians in the world than members of any other faith. But it does nonetheless seem awfully high. Give or take 100 million, are there about 2 billion Christians in the world, something like that?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** The estimate is about 2.2 billion Christians in the world today.

**The Chair:** Okay. So that means roughly 10% of the population of Christians worldwide face persecution.

I actually don't know the answer to this question, but you have some expertise or at least can point us in the right direction. Does that seem...? If we were to look at other groups, other than groups that are very small and nationally concentrated, like the Baha'is, is that substantially higher or is that typical for the percentage of various religious groups facing persecution overall?

**Mr. Don Hutchinson:** Mr. Chair, it is inordinately high, which is why the world watch list is cut off at the top 60 most offensive nations in that regard. When one considers that 60 countries is somewhere between 15% and 18% of the number of nations on the planet, it's a substantial number of nations. In those nations, the ideologically driven persecution is huge, and they are not the only nations.

The list could go on, and go much longer. When you look at the top 60, if you compare lists from previous years, some countries drop off the list and some countries come on the list. Countries move around on the list as they engage in more egregious efforts.

Certainly what took place with the October 9 massacre at Maspero generated concerns about a potential genocide. But there hasn't been any action by the military since then, and the Christians have been

very careful not to gather peacefully in a public location like that, so I wouldn't throw that word around at this point in time. It doesn't make sense to me to say that we should fear genocide in Egypt. What we do need to fear is an increase in the degree of persecution under the potential of a government that has made statements to the effect that they intend to invoke a much stronger form of Islamic sharia law.

• (1405)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Thank you, committee members, for indulging me in that last question.

I just have one item of committee business to deal with. We had intended to do committee business, which would involve rounding up all the non-committee members and hustling them to the exits so that we could go in camera, but it looks like there's about an 80% chance that our witness for Tuesday will be unavailable.

I wonder if I could simply ask the committee if we could delay our committee business until then. We have enough to keep us busy for an hour, because we have to start projecting into the new year and lining up witnesses for then.

Would that be agreeable to members?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you very much.

Thank you to our witness. We really appreciate, Mr. Hutchinson, your coming in. It was very informative indeed.

The meeting is adjourned.

---





**MAIL  POSTE**

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

**Lettermail**

**Poste-lettre**

**1782711  
Ottawa**

*If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:*  
Publishing and Depository Services  
Public Works and Government Services Canada  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

*En cas de non-livraison,  
retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*  
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt  
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada  
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

### **SPEAKER'S PERMISSION**

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and Depository Services  
Public Works and Government Services Canada  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5  
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943  
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757  
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca  
<http://publications.gc.ca>

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

### **PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT**

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les Éditions et Services de dépôt  
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada  
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5  
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943  
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757  
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca  
<http://publications.gc.ca>

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>