

Mamdouh Nakhla Item VI

My name is Mamdouh Nakhla and I am the chair of Al-Kalima Institution for Human Rights representing the Christian Copts who are the descendants of the [pharaohs] who lived there in the Nile valley for 3 000 years even before Christ and spoke Copt before the entry of the Arabs into Egypt after which they were forced to use Arabic, however their Coptic language continues to be used in their churches and writings up to now. They account for about 10 million people in Egypt out of 82 million inhabitants in Egypt, so they represent over 12 per cent of the population. Copts suffer of discrimination on the grounds of their religion and a number of rights some of which are not within the competence of this Forum but I will simply speak of economic rights. for example, state media formal agencies claim that Copts control over 60 per cent of the national economy. This is inaccurate, there are no aggregate statistics by religion in addition many many Copts live under the live of poverty and many of them have menial jobs such as collecting garbage and growing pigs.

In April 2009 the government issued a hasty decision to eliminate all pigs as carriers of H1N1. This decision destroyed the livelihood of 100 of thousands of Coptic families that had lived on growing pigs, collecting garbage and selling their products. Copts also have trouble in accessing leadership positions in the armed forces, police, justice, diplomacy and consular services. And there are no Copts in sensitive position such as in intelligence and the military, which implies that they may not be loyal to their country. They are also subjected to attacks in their churches and their shops. Sometimes those responsible are arrested, other times they are immediately let out and often they are not put to trial. We have the following recommendations: to reconsider putting the religion on ideas to change laws that force Copts to accept agreement after attacks against them; to respond positively to repeated request of the special expert on minorities; and to withdraw reservations in international instruments. We appreciate the decision of the government to accept the latest recommendation to ratify mechanism, of two complete mechanisms. However, we hope that sufficient protection will be provided to us when we return home. I thank you for your attention and I would also like to thank the branch of minority in the OHCHR for helping us assist. Thank you Madam Chairperson for chairing such a good session. Thank you.