

6th session of the Forum on Minority Issues

II. Legal framework and key concepts

Alkalema Center for Human Rights

Thank you, madam, my name is (...), I am the president of Akalema Center for Human Rights in Egypt. This is an NGO combating racial and religious discrimination in Egypt, particularly against Orthodox Copts, who are grandchildren of the earlier funders of Egypt living in the north valley. Since the (...) in forty years Arabic nonetheless, the Coptic language is still used in prayers and in churches. We represent today 17 million and we make up 20 percent of the population, this is the largest religious minority in the region. We are suffering of marginalisation, exclusion, and discriminatory practices we cannot build or we religious centre, this has been the case since the 7th century, however, the situation has worsened since January 25th the revolution and the decision to close Coptic places of worship, we have been subject of attacks by extremist. Churches are being burned down and economic activities are being destroyed, we are facing abduction, often the criminals are not arrested or they can enjoy impunity. This simply agree in compromise with the legal system. We call upon the forum, to establish a centre dealing with problems of religious minorities in Africa and the Middle-East. Since these minorities have to grapple with forced immigration, we ask the Egyptian government also to show respects of all beliefs and religions in their new constitution, the building and restoration of places of worship, even if the government has an official religion this cannot justify in any way actions of aggressions and violations our rights. We exhort everyone to respect the rights of people belonging to religious and linguistic minorities. Thirdly, (...) introduced which does not force Copts to find compromising the aggression of their property and their churches, etcetera. Fourth, the reservation on the convention and articles adopted by Egypt should be lifted, these reservations say that they are limited by the Islamic Shariah. Fifth, Egypt is called upon to leave up to its volunteers and commitments and ratify the UN conventions that are succeeded in the ICCPR recommendations the last session. I am fully aware of the dangers that I what I came here but I would like to send this message to the Office of the High Commission. I would also like to thank Ms Rita Izsák and thank you, excellencies (...) meeting and I would also like to thank all the representatives of minorities fighting using peaceful means to protect their rights.