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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[03 June 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

The Arab Republic of Egypt: Coptic Christian girls and women need better protection

Since the beginning of the year, several girls under the age of 18 belonging to the Coptic community were reported to have disappeared. A former kidnapper is said to have admitted that the perpetrators are paid for each abducted Coptic girl.

The abduction of Coptic women and girls is an ongoing phenomenon in the Arab Republic of Egypt, but has intensified over the past decade. Hundreds of Coptic women are reported to have become victims of abductions and blackmail. Usually, it is not investigated whether the victims were sexually abused while in captivity. The women are abducted with the aim of forcing them to convert to Islam.

Coptic women are also threatened by enforced disappearances: since the beginning of the year, at least four Coptic women have been abducted. On April 22, 2020, several Coptic sources reported the disappearance of a Coptic woman named Ranya Abd al-Masih (39) in the Arab Republic of Egypt. A few days later, she was to be seen in a video recording – in which she wore a black niqab (face veil) and stated to have converted to Islam. In her statement, she emphasized that she did not want any more contact with her family.

Many Copts suspect that radical Muslims are organizing and financing the abductions and forced conversions – as a means to promote the further Islamization of the country's Christian community. It is said that some of the perpetrators are in the service of the state or can at least rely on help from the authorities. The state authorities have been addressed with innumerable complaints, protests, and pleas over the years – but to no avail. This is a further indication that certain authorities in the Arab Republic of Egypt are still under direct influence from radical groups.

It is the responsibility of the government of the Arab Republic of Egypt to investigate these allegations, to stop the abductions, and to bring those responsible to justice. The human rights violations and the inaction of some of the authorities are causing unrest among the Coptic population. Impunity and injustice are leading to a loss of confidence in the government on the part of the Copts, who, together with other Christians, make up between four and 15 percent of the total population of the country's population. The government of the Arab Republic of Egypt must protect the Coptic and Christian population as a whole more effectively. All citizens of the republic, regardless of religion or ethnicity, must feel safe in their country and be able to live there without fear.

Society for Threatened Peoples therefore calls upon the UN Human Rights Council to urge the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt to:

- prevent conversion under threat or external pressure and ensure that conversion to Islam is free and voluntary by enabling all persons who intend to convert to Islam to speak freely with their families under the protection of the state,
- investigate crimes against members of the Christian communities including sexual violence and enforced disappearances in order to prosecute the perpetrators and locate abductees,
- guarantee genuine freedom of religion for all religious communities in the Arab Republic of Egypt – involving more education in schools, universities, and in the media. This also includes adequate broadcasting time on state TV and radio stations with regard to programs for the Coptic population.