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Good afternoon. Thank you Mr. Chairman for organizing this timely hearing. I'm especially pleased to have the opportunity to give testimony on Egypt's not only continuing but growing sectarian problem. I would like to state that my testimony here today represents my individual views and not necessarily the views of any organization with which I'm affiliated, including the Egyptian American Rule of Law Association (EARLA).

Last time I testified on Egypt's sectarian problem, specifically the plight of the Copts, Egypt's Christian population, back in January this year, I began my testimony by quoting 22 year old Mariam Fekry, who had posted a prayer for a wonderful new year in 2011 on her facebook page, just hours before she was killed in a heinous attack on the Saints Church in Alexandria, Egypt on New Year's eve which left 21 dead. When I last testified, I stated that Mariam's hopes, and ultimate fate, so tragically and poignantly illustrate the plight of the Coptic people, Egypt's native Christians, who represent 10-15% of Egypt's 83 million people. I stated that while the Copts are the Middle East's largest Christian minority, they have faced an alarming escalation of violence as state protection has dwindled.

I explained that for at least three decades, we, the Copts, have been offered an authoritarian compact of sorts. The Copts, as all Egyptians, were to live under a draconian emergency law, namely martial law suspending basic constitutional protections, in exchange for the delivery of stability and protection from terrorism. In those three decades, however, Egypt failed to make adequate progress on key developmental indicators, and Egypt's human rights record fared no better: Freedom House consistently classified Egypt as "not free," and Egypt's record on religious freedom went from bad to worse, placing it on the US Commission on International Religious Freedom's (USCIRF's) "watch list" since 2002, for "serious problems of discrimination, intolerance, and other human rights violations against members of religious minorities." After Egypt's revolution, the commission recommended, for the first time, the downgrading of Egypt's status, designating Egypt a "country of particular concern," or CPC, for "engaging in and tolerating egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief. While religious freedom conditions in Egypt had been deteriorating during the last years of the Mubarak regime," USCIRF stated, "since Mubarak's ouster on February 11, conditions have further deteriorated." In USCIRF's view, this deterioration has warranted Egypt's ranking alongside China, Iran, and Afghanistan.

Last time I testified on Egypt's sectarian problem was January 20, only 5 days before the revolution broke out. Back then, I had described the "authoritarian pact" offered by the Mubarak regime as an illusory Faustian bargain, and instead stated that the real answer to Egypt's sectarian crisis is progress toward a democratic state that respects human rights, applies the rule of law and extends equal constitutional protections to all citizens. I also noted that the Egyptian regime will avoid doing so at all

costs. But we soon learned that Egyptians' frustration with decades of tyranny would and could not be indefinitely contained, and on January 25, Egyptians of all stripes took to the streets to determinedly but nonetheless peacefully demonstrate that.

Somewhat cautiously, Christians regarded the revolution as a potential positive turning point and joined their fellow Muslim citizens in demanding fundamental change which they hoped would entail a new Egypt based on principles of equal citizenship, rule of law, and individual freedoms. Instead, Egypt's current trajectory highlights not just substantial challenges to democratic transition, but the absence of political will from the current military de facto regime to affect that transformation. In the process, Egypt's vulnerable groups are more susceptible than ever to unprecedented violence and insecurity.

In 2011 alone, Copts have been the target of 33 sectarian attacks, 12 of which involved an attack on a church. The combined casualties, not counting the latest Maspero massacre, include 72 dead, as well as a substantial number of Christian homes, property, and churches destroyed. With the Maspero massacre, the death toll rises to 97, and the number of those injured exceeds 400. Compared to 2010, these statistics represent more than a 6 fold increase in Christian casualties in 2011.

While it may be alluring to blame the revolution for this serious escalation and praise the relative stability of the Mubarak days, I submit that the same societal ills and perhaps more significantly the insidious state role in inciting sectarian violence plague Egypt more than ever today, and that responsibility lies in no small measure squarely at the foot of the military dictatorship, represented by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) which has taken hold and adopted the old authoritarian tactics, while representing and proclaiming itself the "revolutionary government."

For decades, the regime encouraged and capitalized on the growth of a culture of discrimination against religious minorities, and eventually sectarian crimes became crimes of impunity. Substituting the extension of the rule of law and equal protection of the law, the state always insisted on "reconciliation sessions" where victims and perpetrators were brought together and coerced into extrajudicial settlements by the state security apparatus. In March of 2011, when a Christian man had his ear severed by hardline Islamists known as Salafis in Upper Egypt, SCAF very powerfully continued the message of impunity by forcing the victim not to bring legal charges and failing to investigate or bring the perpetrators to justice. Perceiving the continuation of the status quo, this and similar incidents strengthened extremists' convictions that not only would the state tolerate blatant persecution of Christians and minorities, but it would do so with a nod and a wink for its own interests, much like the days of the Mubarak era. Capitalizing on an environment of literal police absence from Egyptian streets following the revolution--a massive security failure on the interim government's part which itself requires investigation and accountability--the Salafis once again lashed out at Christians in May, when they accused the Coptic church of holding alleged Christian converts to Islam against their will. Incitement by the Salafis in a poor, crowded neighborhood of Cairo resulted in an all out war between Muslims and Christians which lasted for hours, without police or military intervention, leaving 12 dead and 2 churches burnt to the ground.

The response of SCAF to the incident was to send in a Salafi preacher known as Mohamed Hassan to the neighborhood to "pacify the situation." This "preacher" has long been known for his incitement against Christians and calls for their second class citizenship. He is also the same man that was granted a podium and allowed, by the military regime, to preach from Tahrir Square in the weeks following Mubarak's ouster, where he was given free rein to express hate speech.

While the churches were rebuilt, no one was held to account for the day's heinous violence, and when interviewed about this in the independent media, SCAF General Hassan El-Reweiny stated that it was "preposterous" to demand further action on the matter, including an investigation and arrests, since the churches were rebuilt.

Once again, taking their cue from the SCAF's eerily Mubarakist treatment of Egypt's vicious sectarianism, extremist Muslim youths in an Upper Egyptian town called Edfu took it upon themselves in September to destroy a church because it allegedly "lacked the necessary permits," even though the church was an ancient one that had been operating for years. Rather than hold to account the youths who lacked any authority to act on any such claim, the region's governor instead praised the youths who committed this act, and then SCAF refused to fire the governor.

With all these successive tragedies in mind, and compounded by years of societal intolerance, institutionalized discrimination, and state complicity and incitement, which was clearly continuing with the SCAF's blessing, Christians took peacefully to the streets on October 9, as they had alongside other Egyptians during the 18 day uprising, to protest the current military regime and to demand basic civil liberties. Muslim activists and sympathizers joined them in their call. They were, as most of us now know and as is and was documented widely across international media, met with disproportional violence, culminating in live shootings and the crushing of unarmed civilians by armored personnel carriers (APC's). Meanwhile, while the corpses of civilians, most of whom were Christian, were being taken to hospitals, Egyptian state television misrepresented the facts, stating that "Coptic gangs" had killed three soldiers and were attacking the military in a manner "not even the Israelis would dare," even going so far as to exhort "honorable Egyptians" to come to the defense of their military. This incitement directly led to vigilante acts of sectarian violence in Cairo's streets, where some Muslims sought out and targeted Christians for beatings or worse.

Expectedly but no less tragically, the SCAF's ensuing press conference addressing the tragedy blamed the victims and exhorted Egyptians to "put themselves in the place of the soldier driving the APC, who was understandably confused and panicked." Adding insult to injury, the SCAF praised the role of Egyptian state tv, and when asked about the names of the alleged military casualties, refused to release them for "security reasons."

Thus, in the aftermath of the revolution, the state itself has continued institutionalized discrimination and encouraged the growth of a culture of sectarianism and impunity to act on that sectarianism. During the last days of the Mubarak era, a Cairo based human rights organization had described Egypt as a "police state infused increasingly with theocratic elements." I would submit that if you substitute the

word "police state" with "military state," this would be an accurate description of the state of things today. The military regime continues to count on a divide and conquer tactic to consolidate its power, to scapegoat the Copts to deflect from its own governance failures, and to sow instability and simultaneously present itself as the sole solution to that instability, justifying along the way the continuation or institution of new repressive practices and laws. One need only give a cursory look at SCAF's history since its assumption of power: over 12,000 civilians have been tried in military tribunals that do not meet minimum standards of due process, female protesters have been subjected to degrading "virginity tests," the notorious emergency law has been extended, and numerous laws restricting freedom of assembly and even criminalizing criticism of the military have been opaquely passed and enforced in draconian fashion. Local rights groups are already decrying these abuses and more, including the SCAF's pre-election conduct which observers accurately note portents to substantial fraud in upcoming elections, where Islamists are expected to win a substantial parliamentary presence. This parliament, according to the SCAF's transition plan, will be responsible for the drafting of Egypt's new Constitution, raising doubts about whether such a document will embody the aspirations of Egyptians, as expressed through their revolution, which rejected notions of both autocracy and theocracy.

Attempts by the SCAF to issue "guiding principles" for the Constitution are no comfort. While the US government may be banking on SCAF to turn Egypt into a pre-Erdogan Turkish model, what is actually unfolding is more analogous to more insidious models such as the Pakistani one, entailing greater power for Islamists and the marginalization of all other political forces. Avoiding this outcome requires that the US not fall into the trap it previously did with Mubarak, placing as it did all its bets on an authoritarian partner and a police state, which SCAF represents. It means that the US must insist that its support during and for Egypt's transition be contingent on a prompt and genuine democratic transition to a civilian authority which represents the aspirations of all Egyptians and guarantees the equal rights of all, starting with the immediate cessation of sectarian incitement and elimination of all forms of discrimination, and including but not limited to: immediate security sector reform entailing the prompt return of police to the streets; the conduct of free and fair elections; an inclusive and transparent constitutional drafting process; the elimination of laws that repress basic rights and the expansion of the political space to allow a greater role for civil society and nonreligious political parties; and a free civilian presidential race which represents a true handoff of power from the military. Egypt's civilian president must then go about undoing decades of the disease of pernicious sectarianism which has infiltrated society through undertaking substantial legal, institutional, educational, and media reform, all vast tasks which only a person entrusted and vested with the faith of Egyptians and the interests of Egypt--and not the interests of a few privileged generals--could assume. We owe it to those who sacrificed to herald a new era of freedom in the Middle East. We owe it to Mina Daniel, who while anticipating being killed by Mubarak's police forces while camped out in Tahrir Square during the 18 day uprising, survived, only to be killed a few months later at the hands of Mubarak's successors, who represent more of the same.