

## **EGYPT CASE STATEMENT**

Egypt is a country of 104 million people. An estimated 90 million Egyptians identify as Sunni Muslims while about 10 million profess Christianity, forming the largest Christian population of any country in North Africa and the Arab world.

Christians in Egypt have maintained a rich, 2,000-year history since St. Mark the Evangelist arrived there circa 48 A.D. More than 90 percent of Egyptian Christians (known as Copts) belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. Coptic Catholics number only an estimated 250,000 members and are scattered in eight eparchies, from Aswan in the south to Alexandria in the north. The country also hosts smaller Catholic communities belonging to the Armenian, Chaldean, Latin, Maronite, Melkite Greek and Syriac churches.

The country suffers severe humanitarian challenges. An estimated 32.5 percent of the population lives below the poverty line and 9.7 percent are unemployed. The health care system has faced mounting pressure due to the coronavirus pandemic. Workers throughout the country experienced a significant loss of income with the economic downturn that followed.

Economic problems have plagued Egypt's youth, children and other vulnerable groups. The International Labor Organization reports that 27.2 percent of youth are not employed or enrolled in educational or training programs. Schools are overcrowded and lack adequate resources. Teachers receive limited training, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) reports the curriculum focuses on memorization rather than analytical skills. Child labor and discrimination against girls also pose major challenges to the education sector.

Christian populations face disproportionate levels of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, discrimination and violence, while enduring significant restrictions on their religious freedom. For instance, most Christians reside in Upper Egypt, which hosts 40 percent of the country's population. However, the World Bank reports 80 percent of people living in Upper Egypt live in extreme poverty. Other Christians live in Cairo and Alexandria, where many encounter substantial barriers to employment across the public sector, including the armed forces and civil service.

Authorities have long curtailed the rights of Christians to build, maintain and operate churches. Egyptian law requires church leaders to obtain permission from governors in order to construct or renovate churches and to demonstrate that the size of each church will correspond to the "number and need" of Christians already living in a given area. A resolution introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives in January 2021 notes, "of approximately 5,500 unlicensed churches and religious buildings awaiting legalization, authorities have conditionally recognized approximately 1,800." The Egyptian government is working on a new law on the civil status of Egyptian Christians. According to Fides, the bill is expected to be submitted for consideration in the next Parliamentary session, starting 23 January 2022, and put to a vote.

Amid these challenges and threats, Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA) provides critical assistance to sustain and strengthen the Christian presence. Although Catholics are a minority within a minority, they administer an array of programs and services that benefit the most marginalized of the nation's people.

## **PASTORAL PROGRAMS**

Egypt hosts 56 Catholic religious congregations. Under the jurisdiction of the Latin Church operate 11 male and 43 female congregations. Two female congregations are part of the Coptic Catholic Church: the Jesus and Mary Coptic Sisters and Egyptian Sacred Heart Sisters. Through its Seminarian and Novice Formation Program, CNEWA funds the formation of 43 seminarians in two seminaries and eight novices in two novitiates located in Cairo and Alexandria. More than half of the seminarians and novices are from the eparchies of Assiout, Minia, Luxor and Sohag in Upper Egypt, the poorest region of the country. Others come from Cairo, other Catholic Eastern churches in Egypt as well as from Sudan, Iraq, Jordan and Syria.

CNEWA sponsors multiple programs to prepare catechists, working to unify the vision of the church regarding Catholic teachings across all eight eparchies. It funds a program by Coptic Catholic Patriarch Ibrahim Sidrak that forms 50 catechists nationwide, approximately six individuals from each of the eight eparchies, who in turn will teach some 2,000 adults and 20,000 children.

In the eparchy of Ismailiyah in northeast Egypt, CNEWA funds a catechism program for 300 children. CNEWA also supports a training program on the protection of children for 150 staff who work with children in church or church-related institutions, including hospitals and schools.

## **HEALTH CARE**

CNEWA funds medical care and health awareness training to an estimated 21,000 individuals, mostly women and children, in low-income areas of the Assiout and Luxor governorates in Upper Egypt as well as in Cairo. The local church will establish primary care centers to serve 1,000 people annually across three villages in Assiout that lack adequate medical facilities and where residents suffer from high rates of chronic illnesses, anemia, malnutrition and disabilities. This program also will provide first aid and health awareness trainings to 1,000 adults and 500 youth in these localities.



In the Al Salamiya village in Luxor, which is marked by high rates of illiteracy and unemployment, CNEWA will fund the dispensary — which charges only \$1 per consultation — and equip it with ophthalmic equipment. The new services will provide health care to an estimated 20,000 people, Muslims and Christians alike, from some 15 rural communities.

## **RESIDENTIAL CARE FOR AT-RISK ORPHAN CHILDREN AND ELDERLY**



In Egypt, CNEWA sponsors programs that create a safety net for the most vulnerable members of society who are unable to care for themselves: at-risk, orphan children and elderly, low-income individuals who lack family support. In Minia, Upper Egypt, CNEWA provides for the Daughters of Saint Ann to house 20 elderly, bedridden residents. CNEWA also funds 12 church-related institutions across the country that operate residential care homes

serving a total of 278 orphaned or abandoned children. All the children attend school, and the institutions work to support their enrollment in higher education or training where possible.

Additionally, CNEWA supports the Santa Lucia Home for the Blind, administered by the Franciscan Sisters of the Cross. Named for the patron saint of the blind and built with funds from CNEWA's donors more than 30 years ago, Santa Lucia's hosts 18 visually impaired students, ensuring that they have the food, healthcare and tutoring they need.

## **EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING**

CNEWA maintains a strong commitment to support the education and vocational training of Egypt's youth. It sponsors diverse educational programs serving a total of 3,257 students. CNEWA partners with the Congregation of Jesus and Mary Coptic School, located in Izbet el Nakhl, a low-income area of Cairo, to serve 2,100 students by providing smart boards and counseling by a psychologist. It also contributes computers and IT infrastructure to the Good Shepherd Sisters orphanage in Shubra, one of the largest neighborhoods of Cairo, and to the Don Bosco Primary School for a computer laboratory in Alexandria.

