



## Egypt: A Diverse and Inclusive Nation

**Over thousands of years, Egypt has been home to many religions and has a tradition of diverse communities growing and thriving alongside one another. Despite different beliefs, all Egyptians share a common bond: strong historic national identity and pride in cultural diversity. As President Abdel Fattah El Sisi said during the opening of the New Suez Canal in 2015, “The secret to the greatness of the Egyptian people and to their strength lies in the fact that they are united as one entity, standing together hand in hand.”**

### PROMOTING PLURALISM & COMBATTING EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES

- › Since taking office in 2014, President El Sisi has made promoting greater religious tolerance and strengthening unity among all Egyptians a cornerstone of his agenda. The government collaborates regularly with religious leaders at home and abroad to promote tolerance and improve protections from discrimination for people of all faiths.
- › Egypt is preserving its religious history. In July 2017, the government allocated \$2 million to restore Egypt’s largest synagogue, the 160-year-old Prophet Elijah Synagogue in Alexandria.
- › President El Sisi has advised Al Azhar University in Cairo, the most prestigious center of Islamic learning in the world, to encourage its clergy to reaffirm the true tolerant values of Islam, bring tolerance and compassion into religious discourse and eliminate hateful speech from Islamic teachings. The Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Extremism also tracks social media and online discussion to counter ideological and religious extremism with the true meaning of Islam worldwide.
- › Dar Al-Ifta, Egypt’s official religious educational institution, launched an international council known as the General Secretariat for Fatwa Authorities Worldwide in December 2015 to stimulate discussion about some of the most pressing issues facing Islam and Muslim youth. This included establishing an interfaith dialogue between the various sects of Islam as well as a regular discourse between religious leaders of many faiths.

### COPTIC CHRISTIANITY IN EGYPT

- › Coptic Christians today form the largest Christian community in the Middle East.
- › Since the 19th century, Copts have been appointed to all offices, including as judges to Egyptian courts and as heads of local governorates, and served as government employees. Today there are 36 Coptic Christian members of Egypt’s Parliament, the largest number to serve since the establishment of Parliament in 1866. President El Sisi also recently swore in Egypt’s first-ever female Coptic Christian governor.
- › In 2014, President El Sisi and Egypt’s armed forces launched a multi-phase effort to rebuild and restore all churches that had been damaged by acts of terrorism by operatives of the Muslim Brotherhood organization in the summer of 2013. These horrific acts destroyed or damaged 56 churches, alongside numerous Christian-owned properties.
- › President El Sisi has attended Coptic Christmas mass yearly since 2015, when he became the first Egyptian president to do so. In 2018, he inaugurated the newly-constructed Nativity of Christ Cathedral in Egypt’s New Administrative Capital. The new cathedral is the largest in the Middle East and enshrines the role of the Coptic community in a prominent place in Egypt’s new capital.



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We, with the grace of God, are offering a message of peace and love from here, not just to Egyptians or to the region, but to the entire world.”

—PRESIDENT EL SISI  
AT COPTIC CHRISTMAS  
MASS  
JANUARY 2018





## COPTIC CHRISTIANITY IN EGYPT *(Continued)*

- In 2016, Egypt's Parliament passed a landmark law supported by the leaders of the Coptic, Catholic and Anglican churches that facilitates the timely construction and licensing of churches. The law eliminated many of the bureaucratic and legislative obstacles that previously delayed progress. The legislation overhauled antiquated rules written during the Ottoman Empire in 1856, building new bridges between Christians and Muslims.
- In April 2018, the government moved to grant legal status to 102 Christian churches and 64 church-related buildings across Egypt, in line with the 2014 constitution, which guarantees the right to freedom of religious practice for Muslims, Christians and Jews. This followed a February 2018 decision by Egypt's Cabinet to confirm the legal status of 53 unlicensed churches in accordance with the new church law.
- In August 2018, President El Sisi met with H.H. Pope Tawadros II and a delegation from the First International Youth Forum of Egypt's Coptic Church, reiterating that Egypt's Muslims and Copts have always shared strong bonds of brotherhood and co-existence.

## THE VATICAN AND AL AZHAR

- In May 2016, Al Azhar Grand Imam Dr. Ahmed El Tayyeb met with Pope Francis at the Vatican, the first such meeting since the Grand Imam's 2011 meeting with Pope Benedict XVI.
- In February 2017, Al Azhar and the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue jointly hosted in Cairo a symposium on countering extremism and religious violence. Al Azhar and Vatican representatives called for eliminating the "spirit of hatred and animosity for religions and defaming religious symbols;" cutting off resources, including money and weapons, to terrorist organizations; and addressing the "causes of the phenomena of extremism, violence, poverty, ignorance and the political abuse of religion and incorrect understanding of religious texts."
- In April 2017, Pope Francis traveled to Egypt for a historic visit that built upon growing engagement between Egypt and the Vatican. During this first papal visit since Pope John Paul II in 2000, Pope Francis met with President El Sisi, Coptic Pope Tawadros II, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar and other Coptic and Islamic leaders. "Your Holiness on the land of Egypt is a declaration to the world of the strength of our national unity," President El Sisi said during their visit to Al Azhar University.

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There is no difference between a Muslim and a Christian here. We are all part of this land and all Egyptians are responsible for confronting extremist ideas and terrorism.”

—POPE TAWADROS II  
AT COPTIC CHRISTMAS MASS  
JANUARY 2018



To symbolize interfaith collaboration in the movement for independence, Egyptians, both Muslim and Coptic, raised this flag during the Revolution of 1919 to symbolize national unity, featuring a Muslim crescent and a Christian cross at its center.