

## **Program Webinar: Comparing inclusive Citizenship in Egypt with Europe**

**Sept. 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

Program title: Comparing inclusive Citizenship in Egypt with Europe

**Period:** Saturday September 26, 2020.

**Organized by:** the Center for Arab-West Understanding (Egypt), the Institute of Missiology at Missio-Aachen, the Anglican Province of Egypt with funding from the Shiraka fund of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, applied for by the SGP, Reformed Political Party (Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij, SGP), a conservative Christian political party in the Netherlands.

**General purpose:** We are realizing that Egypt is country with a great history in Muslim-Christian relations and where many excellent initiatives are taking place in the field of intercultural dialogue. For this reason, the Center for Arab-West Understanding has built, in cooperation with others, a very large electronic English language database about the role of religion in the wider context of contemporary Egyptian society. The Center for Arab-West Understanding is trying to set up a research center to foster intercultural dialogue. The subject of Inclusive Citizenship was chosen by Archbishop Dr. Mouneer Hanna Anis, head of the Anglican/Episcopal Province of Egypt

**Number and profile of participants:** 25 students and scholars with a significant interest in the future of Christian-Muslim relations in Egypt. Muslims and Christians who are thinking seriously and creatively about interfaith relations for a prosperous future for Egypt.

**Publication:** Contributions of speakers will be recorded, transcripts will be made and texts, after approval of the speakers, will be placed in the database of Arab-West Report and thus become documents that can be used for further academic study.

### **Inclusive citizenship in Egypt and Europe in comparative perspective**

Inclusive citizenship can be defined as an approach to governance and communal life which prioritizes and maintains the equal rights of all citizens, including political participation, access to justice, economic rights, and social rights. In addition, a commitment to inclusive citizenship attempts to identify and address obstacles, whether they are legal, cultural, or both. The term inclusive citizenship is often used by Christians in Egypt to advocate full equality with Muslims. We then have to distinguish between the constitution and various legal provisions: civil law, personal status law and practices in society. Arguments about lack of equality are often in four areas:

- Conversions from one religion to the other. A Christian can convert to Islam and change the religion on his/her ID but vice versa is not possible.
- Building houses of worship, it is argued that it is easier to obtain a permit for a mosque than for a church.
- Incidents of violence of radicals claiming Islam as their religion against Christians.

- Being equally represented in higher government positions (including military and police) The argument of being insufficiently represented is directly linked to claims about the number of Christians in Egypt. According to the CAPMAS the percentage of Christians was 6,24% in 1976. This is the last year the CAPMAS asked a question about religion in the census. This is disputed by the Coptic Orthodox Church that claims its own statistics which, however, were never published and cannot be verified. The CAPMAS has records of the smallest administrative units that are computed to a total number and percentage. Some Coptic Orthodox bishops such as Bishop Marcos of Shubra al-Khayma seem to have an advanced registration system while others do not. Neither individual Coptic Orthodox bishops have given access to their figures nor has the Coptic Orthodox Pope.

Our webinar reflects on the ideal of inclusive citizenship in Egypt and Europe. In particular, we are interested in Muslim and Christian perspectives on this ideal and the obstacles that we encounter in seeking to make our societies more inclusive. Through this webinar, our esteemed speakers will address issues such as the following:

- What theological and historical resources do Islam and Christianity bring to help us pursue the ideal of inclusive citizenship?
- Many Christians in Egypt feel that they are disadvantaged in various ways in Egyptian society. How should we interpret this? What can be done to address the concerns of Christians in Egypt? How might Muslims and Christians help in this effort?
- For the last several decades, the place of Muslims and Islam in Europe has become increasingly controversial. European far-right political movements and Islamophobia has been on the rise. What challenges do Muslims face in Europe? What effect did this have on relations between Muslims and Christians in Egypt?
- Other topics that speakers wish to raise that will enrich the webinar.

### **Introduction Webinar: 10.00 – 10.30 am – Drs. Cornelis Hulsman**

Recorded introduction Archbishop Mouneer

### **1) Topic: Christian Perspectives on Citizenship 10.30 – 11.30**

- Mr. Bas Belder, former member of European Parliament (SGP) presented his views in writing. The SGP Party has for decades shown an active interest in the societal position of fellow Christians in Egypt, in particular with regard to the fundamental right of freedom of belief, freedom of religion. Mr. Belder then used Coptic activist sources as the basis for questions about statements of Archbishop Mouneer and a number of incidents. One of his sources, Adel Guindy, lashes out to “individual Copts, often clerical leaders, for their complicity in or at least acquiescence to their flock’s treatment – a phenomenon he traces to the modern era.” Archbishop Mouneer was furious and said Coptic activists outside Egypt do not live in Egypt and therefore do not know what is taking place in Egypt.
- **Paper:** [INCLUSIVE CITIZENSHIP – Bishop Mouneer](#)
- Dr. Hoda Awad, professor of political science at Misr University, board member Center for Arab-West Understanding. Dr. Hoda Awad defined citizenship in Egypt, universal values, their place in Egypt’s Constitution and practice and the Christian perspective. responding to Mr. Bas Belder. Egypt is suffering from the Salafi and Wahabi ideas that

have been brought to Egypt. Changes are needed but unlike Adel Guindy claims there is a political will to affect these changes and thus “there is a strong hope to realize the meaning of Inclusive Citizenship in Egypt.”

- **Paper:** [INCLUSIVE CITIZENSHIP IN EGYPT; PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE – Dr. Hoda Awad](#)

## 2) Topic: The Experience of Christians in Egypt/the Middle East 12.00 – 13.00

- Bishop Qulta, Coptic Catholic Church Egypt, In Search for True Peace and Coexistence Between People of Different Beliefs. Bishop Qulta starts with a prayer of Pharaoh Akhenaten about God being the Creator, the principle of life and peace. In order for God to be at work science needs to align with religion to ensure human dignity and every human being should work at the service of other human beings. Human beings should be spiritual, living according to the Word of God, moral and social. The bishop believes that in religious plurality, there is a divine secret and wisdom. Inter-religious dialogue is vital for the promotion of true peace, a vital means to discover God through other people, to discover God through our differences. There are indeed some obstacles and differences but these should not be attributed to specific people or to present governments. These are the vestiges of a heavy heritage following centuries of history. They are the result of the sin of history and of past times.
- **Paper:** [IN SEARCH FOR TRUE PEACE AND COEXISTENCE BETWEEN PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT BELIEFS – Bishop Qulta](#)

**13.00 – 14.00 Lunch time**

**14.00 – Dr. Matthew Anderson (US) joins and becomes moderator from this point onwards.**

## 3) Topic: The Challenge of Muslim Citizenship in the West 14.00 – 15.30

- Dr Wael Faruq was born and raised in Egypt, studied in Italy where he became associate professor of Arabic language at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Italy. Dr. Faruq spoke about how Muslims experience Italy and Europe. How might these lessons relate to inclusive citizenship in Egypt? We need to be freed from harmful stereotypes in Western societies. The origin of the crisis of Islamic societies – both at the individual and collective level – can be attributed to the mixture of a stiffened tradition and a distorted modernity.
- **Paper:** [THE CHALLENGE OF MUSLIM CITIZENSHIP IN EUROPE – Dr. Wael Farouq](#)

## 4) Topic: Muslim Perspectives on Citizenship 16.00 -17.15

- Dr. Tarek al-Gawhary, MA Azhar University, PhD Princeton University, advisor to Sheikh Dr. Ali Goma'a. Islam is a very legalistic religion. It was thus important for Dr. Tarek al-Gawhary to explain the thought process in Islamic Law and how a Muslim jurist can think about the concept of inclusive citizenship in a historical context. The basis is in the Constitution of Medina or the Charter of Medina. The Qur'an celebrates the concept of diversity. In particular with this speaker the question and answer section was important. Dr. Tarek stated that people in the Office for Religious Freedom in the State Department have no legitimacy to speak about religious freedom in other countries

because they do not take the specific context of Egypt or other countries into consideration. Egypt is not an ideal country but the way Egypt has been portrayed is unjust. There is a strong Salafi-Wahabi influence on the streets of Egypt. Christian migration from Egypt is a disaster for the country. Education is of key importance. Dr. Tarek explained the historical context of apostasy and said “If you want to leave Islam leave, if you want to believe believe and if you do not want to believe, don’t believe.” Western scholars give attention to the so-called covenant of Umar that dates to the 9<sup>th</sup> century and is very oppressive for Christians. Dr. Tarek calls this covenant “apocryphal” with a weak transmission chain and therefore not a reliable source. It is true that there is an internal debate in Islam about this apocryphal document but it is not referenced in the circles of Dr. Tarek al-Gawhary.

- **Paper:** [ISLAMIC ROOTS FOR INCLUSIVE CITIZENSHIP – Dr. Tarek Al-Gawhary](#)

#### **5) Ways of Promoting Citizenship 17.15 – 18.30**

- Dr. Kamal Boraiqa, Azhar Dialogue Center  
Positive developments in the area of inclusive citizenship in Egypt. Dr. Boraiqa spoke about a number of points in the paper of Mr. Bas Belder. Terrorism is a challenge to real citizenship. It is important to launch “media campaigns to break down the psychological barriers that have been erected by propagandists of violence, isolation and hatred among the followers of different faiths.” It is equally important to highlight the House of the Egyptian Family in which Muslim and Christian leaders cooperate and respond to various forms of extremism.
- Fr. Dr. Giuseppe Scattolin, Dar Comboni, Cairo, argued that in order to find a common ground on the question of Inclusive Citizenship we should use the same terms for the same realities. This is now insufficiently done. We also must make an effort to seriously study historical facts instead of allowing ideologies dictate our thinking.
- Dr. Matthew Anderson, Georgetown University, USA, closed this webinar through summing up the main observations of the speakers.