

By **Geoffrey P. Johnston**

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"The protection of the rights of the individual and minority rights should be part of any evolving democracy, through its constitution, as well as through its practice and policy," says Dwight Bashir, deputy director for policy and research at the

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

, a bipartisan federal commission tasked with advising the U.S. government on matters of religious liberty around the world.

For decades, the Egyptian government has openly persecuted Christians. For example, says Bashir, the country's security services have interfered in Coptic affairs, obstructing the basic maintenance of churches and blocking building permits for new churches. Islamic terrorists are an even greater threat to Coptic Christians.