

Bahá'í International Community

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The Bahá'í International Community's List of Issues Submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' 79th Session

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Arab Republic of Egypt

I. Introduction

1. The Bahá'í International Community (BIC) respectfully submits this List of Issues in advance of the Committee's consideration of Egypt's fifth periodic report under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) at its 79th session. The BIC represents the worldwide Bahá'í community and engages on issues related to freedom of religion or belief, non-discrimination, minority rights, and social cohesion at the United Nations.
2. Despite longstanding claims by the State party that all citizens enjoy equal rights without discrimination, the Bahá'í community in Egypt continues to face systemic and legally institutionalized barriers to exercising economic, social, and cultural rights. In April 2025, the UN Special Procedures documented a wide range of civil and personal rights violations faced by the Bahá'ís in Egypt.¹ Because the state does not recognize the Bahá'í Faith, adherents are denied the ability to properly obtain essential identity documents, which in turn restricts access to healthcare, education, employment, and other state services. Their marriages are not legally recognized, leaving their children without legal status and exposing families to numerous legal, economic, social, and religious vulnerabilities. These restrictions also affect burial rights and leave Bahá'ís without adequate protection from harassment and surveillance, creating a pervasive climate of insecurity and marginalization.
3. The State party's fifth periodic report (E/C.12/EGY/5) does not address the situation of Bahá'ís or other unrecognized religious groups and fails to identify measures to prevent discrimination on religious grounds. The Committee has previously expressed concern that domestic legislation does not provide full protection against discrimination on all Covenant-protected grounds, as reflected in its concluding observations on the combined second to fourth periodic reports of Egypt.² These concerns remain unaddressed.
4. Given these long-standing inconsistencies between Egypt's stated commitments and the reality of its Bahá'í citizens, and in view of the State party's immediate obligations under Article 2(2) and General Comment No. 20,³ this submission highlights key areas requiring clarification and action, and proposes questions for the Committee to raise with the State party.

II. Discrimination and Legal Documentation (Articles 2(2), 6, 13)

5. While the 2014 Constitution of Egypt states that freedom of belief is “absolute” (Article 64) and that citizens are equal before the law without discrimination (Article 53), the State party continues to deny full legal recognition of religions beyond Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. This policy effectively excludes Bahá'ís from accessing civil documentation and essential State services, since national identification cards require declaration of religion as a prerequisite for legal recognition and access to public services.
6. Between 2004 and 2008, Bahá'ís were denied identity documents altogether, unable to list “Baha’i” as an option under the religion column. Following a 2008 judicial ruling, individuals were permitted to obtain identification cards with a dash (“–”) in the religion field. However, access to this option is limited to those able to provide documentary proof of Bahá'í background, and applications may only be processed through a single office nationwide. This creates

¹ See [ALEGY/1/2025](#).

² See [E/C.12/EGY/CO/2-4](#).

³ See [E/C.12/GC/20](#).

significant financial and administrative burdens requiring multiple visits and extensive travel and in many cases, Baha’i Egyptians remain unable to obtain formal identification cards due to lack of necessary background documentation.

7. Even when identity documents are issued, the use of the dash remains a marker that exposes individuals to discrimination in employment, higher education, and routine interactions with authorities. Barriers persist at checkpoints, government offices, universities, and during domestic and international travel, restricting Bahá’ís’ ability to participate fully in civic and economic life.
8. These practices contravene Article 2(2) of the ICESCR, which prohibits discrimination in access to Covenant rights, Article 6 on the right to work, and Article 13 on the right to education. They also contradict the State party’s assertion in its fifth periodic report that cultural rights and access to services are guaranteed to all citizens “without discrimination” (para. 117), which does not address the religious identification system or its effects on unrecognized religious groups.

9. Questions:

- 9.1. What specific legal and administrative measures does the State party plan to adopt to ensure that the national identification system complies with Article 2(2) of the Covenant, particularly in guaranteeing that access to civil documentation and public services is not conditioned on affiliation with a State-recognized religion and is accessible to all religious groups?
- 9.2. Will the State party remove the religion field from national identity documents and civil registration procedures to bring the documentation system into full compliance with Article 2(2) of the Covenant and eliminate all forms of discrimination arising from the inclusion of religious affiliation?
- 9.3. Please explain what legal and administrative safeguards the State party has adopted to ensure that the use of the dash (“–”) in the religion field of national identity documents does not result in direct or indirect discrimination in access to employment, education, public services, or interactions with authorities.

III. Non-Recognition of Marriage and Family Rights (Article 10)

10. Despite constitutional protections for family life, the State party continues to deny legal recognition of Bahá’í marriages. Civil status laws recognize only Islamic and Christian marriages, resulting in the complete exclusion of Bahá’ís from legal marriage procedures. Article 134 of the Internal Regulations of the Registrar General’s Office explicitly prohibits notarization of Bahá’í marriages “among themselves or between them and adherents of other religions recognized in the Arab Republic of Egypt.” As a result, Bahá’í couples are unable to formalize their marital status, access civil protections, or register family relationships.
11. In 2017, officials from the Ministry of Justice advised the Bahá’í community that couples should individually seek judicial rulings to validate their marriages. Between 2017 and 2020, 43 such lawsuits were filed; courts recognized 27 marriages, while 16 were rejected. Notwithstanding these judicial determinations, the State party has subsequently filed appeals against several court decisions, thereby preventing the enforcement of rulings recognizing Bahá’í marriages. Moreover, some couples whose marital status had been lawfully updated to “married” on national identity documents in 2017 were issued renewed identity cards in 2022 indicating a “single”

status. Officials at the Office of Civil Status reported that the Ministry of Interior had instructed them not to issue any official documentation reflecting a “married” status for individuals whose religion field contains a dash (“-”). These practices create a systemic barrier that perpetuates legal insecurity for Bahá’í families and undermines judicial rulings.

12. This denial has significant consequences for family unity and legal identity. Even when Bahá’í marriages are lawfully registered abroad, they are not recognized domestically, preventing spouses from exercising rights related to inheritance, pension benefits, and citizenship status. Children born to Bahá’í parents are also affected: although the State report asserts that all children have the right to a name and identity documentation (para. 75), birth certificates are frequently denied on the basis that parents’ marriages are not legally recognized. This leaves children without legal identity, obstructing access to healthcare, education, and other social services.
13. These policies violate Article 10 of the ICESCR, which requires States to provide the “widest possible protection and assistance” to families, and Article 2(2), which prohibits discrimination based on religion. Lack of civil documentation further interferes with rights protected under Articles 12 and 13 by restricting access to healthcare and education. The failure to recognize Bahá’í marriages therefore constitutes a systemic denial of family rights and essential legal protections.

14. Questions:

- 14.1. Given the intergenerational discriminatory impact of Article 134, will the State party repeal Article 134 of the Internal Regulations of the Registrar General’s Office (or any other domestic legal provisions) that prohibit the recognition of Bahá’í marriage?
- 14.2. What measures will the State party take to ensure equal legal recognition of marriages between Bahá’ís and individuals of other religions or no religion?
- 14.3. What specific measures will the State party adopt to ensure that children of Bahá’í parents have equal access to birth registration and related rights?
- 14.4. What measures will the State party adopt to ensure that the marital status of Bahá’í couples recognized by the courts as married is accurately reflected on national identity documents, and that administrative instructions preventing such updates are rescinded to comply with Articles 10 and 2(2) of the Covenant?
- 14.5. Will the State party systematically review its registration, civil status, and identity-documentation procedures to identify and remove discrimination based on religion, in line with its obligations under Article 2(2) of the Covenant?

IV. Burial Rights (Article 15(1)(a))

15. The right to take part in cultural life under Article 15(1)(a) of the ICESCR includes the ability to observe burial practices consistent with one’s faith. Despite this obligation, Bahá’ís in Egypt face systemic restrictions on burial and cemetery access. Following Decree 263 of 1960, properties belonging to the Bahá’í community – including cemeteries previously maintained in Alexandria, Port Said, and Ismailia – were confiscated, leaving the community with only one burial ground for the entire country, now nearing full capacity. As a result, families are required to travel long distances to bury or visit deceased relatives, in violation of Bahá’í burial laws, which stipulate interment within one hour of the place of death.

16. Legal efforts in recent years to obtain new cemetery land in Alexandria and Port Said were rejected after a recommendation by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar stating that “it is not permissible to allocate a plot of land for the burial of the dead for those who have the (–) dash sign or anything else,” on grounds that doing so would contribute to “segregation, division, and rupture the fabric of the community.” This recommendation was formally endorsed by the State Commissioner in June 2021, resulting in continued denial of burial access for Bahá’ís and institutionalizing discrimination even after death.
17. The issue of cemeteries was raised in the UN Special Procedures’ April 2025 Allegation Letter (AL EGY 1/2025). In reply, the State party stated that “the relevant authorities have the discretion to determine and regulate the number of cemeteries based on certified statistics,” asserting that there is sufficient burial space.⁴ This, however, contradicts the reality of Bahá’ís in Egypt, who are now considering vertical burial systems to honor their deceased while preserving religious practices.
18. While Egypt’s fifth periodic report asserts that “every citizen [...] has a right to culture and it is up to the State to uphold that right [...] without discrimination” (para. 117), current burial policies contradict this claim by preventing Bahá’ís from exercising essential cultural and religious rites. These restrictions amount to a violation of Article 15(1)(a), and when imposed selectively based on religion, constitute prohibited discrimination under Article 2(2).

19. Questions:

- 19.1. What concrete steps will the State party take to restore and return to the Bahá’í community the previously allocated burial lands in Alexandria, Port Said, and Ismailia, in order to guarantee their access to cemeteries in full compliance with their rights under Article 15(1)(a) of the ICESCR and to ensure protection of their religious and cultural rights without discrimination?
- 19.2. What measures is the State party taking to ensure sufficient access to burial grounds for all religious communities, without discrimination, in light of Article 15(1)(a) and Article 2(2) of the Covenant?
- 19.3. What measures have been taken to respond to the concerns raised in the 2025 UN Special Procedures Allegation Letter (AL EGY 1/2025) regarding discriminatory denial of burial rights, and how does the State party plan to address the systemic barriers identified?

V. Surveillance, Security Harassment and Restrictions on Movement (Articles 2, 6, 10, 13, 15)

20. Members of the Bahá’í community in Egypt are subject to systematic harassment, monitoring, and intimidation by government authorities, particularly agencies associated with National Security. Bahá’ís routinely face interrogations, restrictions on movement and freedom of association, and limitations on carrying out community activities. Friends and associates of Bahá’ís are also targeted, often interrogated or pressured to sever ties. These practices form part of a broader framework of state-sponsored discrimination, manifested through airport watchlists, repeated summons to the National Security Agency, and restrictions on Bahá’í community life.

⁴ See [HRC/NONE/2025/SP/29](https://www.hrc.org/en/instruments/communications/2025/sp/29).

21. A recurring form of harassment is the placement of Bahá'ís on airport "on arrival" watchlists, resulting in frequent interrogations and intimidation during travel. Between January and September 2025, more than fifteen incidents were reported in which Bahá'ís were stopped and interrogated, with durations ranging from 45 minutes to over 13 hours. A particularly notable case involved Mr. Omid Seioshanseian, a non-Egyptian senior Bahá'í official, who in December 2024 was forcibly detained for over 13 hours at Cairo International Airport. During this detention, he was interrogated about personal, family, and community matters, handcuffed, blindfolded, physically mistreated, and threatened, while his personal belongings, including his passport and devices, were confiscated. He was explicitly told that the Bahá'í Faith is illegal in Egypt and that meeting with Bahá'ís constituted a violation of the law.
22. In recent years, members of the Bahá'í community have been routinely summoned to the highest security authorities. These interrogations have included questioning regarding personal communications, social media activity, and peaceful community engagement. In September 2025, for example, two separate summonses involved confiscation of mobile devices, tampering with devices, and inhumane treatment including blindfolding and prolonged detention without cause. Authorities have indicated that heightened surveillance and harassment are matters of state policy, with no intention to ease the civil, social, or economic burdens faced by Bahá'ís or to recognize their institutions.
23. State authorities also restrict Bahá'í communal life. Public gatherings, including community initiatives, are frequently prohibited or relocated under the pretext of "promoting Bahá'ism." Humanitarian or social initiatives involving Bahá'ís are likewise targeted.
24. These patterns constitute clear violations of Egypt's obligations under Article 2(2) (non-discrimination), Article 6 (right to work), Article 10 (protection of the family), Article 13 (right to education), and Article 15 (right to participate in cultural life). The ongoing monitoring, harassment, and interference with Bahá'í community life create a climate of fear that undermines the ability of the community to freely exercise its rights, participate in cultural and social life, and engage in peaceful association.
25. **Questions:**
 - 25.1. What measures will the State party take to end the systematic surveillance, harassment, and intimidation of Bahá'ís by airport, national security, or other authorities?
 - 25.2. How will the State party ensure that members of the Bahá'í community can travel freely within and outside Egypt without being placed on watchlists or subjected to arbitrary interrogations?
 - 25.3. How will the State party address the isolating and chilling effect caused by the harassment, surveillance, or intimidation of friends and colleagues of Bahá'ís, ensuring that individuals who maintain lawful social, cultural, or humanitarian contacts with Bahá'ís are protected from discrimination?
 - 25.4. Will the State party take steps to guarantee that Bahá'ís can organize and participate in community, social, and humanitarian activities without fear of interference or reprisal?
 - 25.5. What mechanisms will the State party implement to monitor, investigate, and remedy instances of state-sponsored harassment, detention, or surveillance of Bahá'ís, ensuring compliance with Articles 2(2), 6, 10, 13, and 15 of the ICESCR?