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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[12 May 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Coptic Christians are treated as second-class citizens in Egypt

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The emergency rule following the attacks on Coptic churches in Alexandria and Tantra on Palm Sunday will not help to curb terrorist attacks against Christians, but will stir up violence. The emergency rule will lead to more politically motivated arrests, which will enrage the civilian population, which could again turn against the Christians. Society for Threatened Peoples is afraid that with every new repressive measure against dissenters in Egypt, the Copts will have to suffer. Since President Al Sisi took office in June 2014, more than 67,000 Egyptians have been arrested for political reasons. Almost 2,000 people were sentenced to death in unfair trials, while torture and violent deaths are commonplace in the prisons. Members of the opposition are suffering from massive persecution, causing a climate of violence – also against the Christian minority. The radical Islamists are attacking the Copts as a statement against the government, as it is trying to win over the Copts for electoral reasons. The Islamists and the state are instrumentalizing the Copts for their own interests.

Exodus of the Christian population must be stopped

In order to stop the exodus of Egypt's Christian population, the country's politicians should be urged to publicly support them. Egypt must finally acknowledge that it is both a Muslim as well as a Christian country – and that the Christians must not be disadvantaged because of their religion. The Copts had to endure discrimination and exclusion for decades. The only way to improve their situation is to ensure that there are constant reminders from abroad.

The authorities in Egypt have been treating the Copts as second-class citizen for decades. There is not enough protection from attacks, and they are barely able to assert their rights because they are not seen as equal – neither by their Muslim fellow citizens nor by the police or the judiciary. Many attacks against Christians are not punished; they are disadvantaged against the Muslim population when it comes to building churches, and they are not adequately represented (with regard to their share of the population) in leading positions of the police, the army, the state-controlled economy, or in society in general.

Situation on the Sinai

The cruel attacks of the IS against liberal Muslims and members of other religious groups must not go unpunished. On 4 April 2017, the terrorist organization had published a video via the often-used telecommunications channel Telegram, showing the beheading of two elderly men in the desert. They were said to have been guilty of apostasy and witchcraft, and they had apparently been sentenced to death by a Sharia Court. As of 4 April 2017, no further details regarding the circumstances or victims' identities were given.

The crimes of the IS have to be punished in order to curb the acts of terror against the civilian population of Sinai. Evidence suggests that the victims could be Sufis, as the IS has repeatedly accused Sufis of witchcraft before. The Muslim mystics are persecuted by Muslim extremists in several countries (Libya, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran). The recent IS-video also shows how the religious police of the terrorist organization charges a meeting of Sufis.

However, the victims could also be Christians. 143 Coptic families fled from the north of Sinai in early March 2017, after seven Christians had been murdered by extremists in February 2017. During the last few months, IS has stepped up its attacks against religious minorities in Egypt, in order to spread fear among members of other religions and to drive them from the country. In the first week of April 2017, the neighboring country Israel warned its citizens to leave Sinai immediately as IS will probably carry out more attacks in the crisis region.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to urge the government of Egypt to:

- End the discrimination against the Coptic Christians in Egypt
- Publicly raise its voice and acknowledge that Egypt is both a Muslim and a Christian country