

'We are Christian,' boys tell Muslims

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The organization aims to "reveal the untold stories â€" which are not told by the conventional Arabic press."

He told WND the boys, Mario Medhat Ramses, 11, and Andrew Medhat Ramses, 13, now are facing a future without educational opportunities even though they had been classified as "brilliant" students at the French Lycee school of Alexandria.

Grace said Egypt's ministry of education ordered the boys to take the test that would result in their conversion to Islam because their father, who left the family about five years ago, had decided to convert from Christianity to Islam.

The parents, Medhat Ramses and Camellia Medhat were a Christian couple when the boys were born, but the father then divorced the mother, leaving his sons behind, and converted to Islam to marry a Muslim.

But Islamic religious law, which has been adopted by the civil government in Egypt, requires that children follow the faith of any parent who converts to Islam, "since Islam is the superior religion that abrogated all other religions," Grace said.

And leaving the children "to follow the corrupted religions (Christianity and Judaism) of the other parent would be condemning the kids to the doom of hell fire where Christians, Jews and all other non-Muslims are destined," he said.

"We need all human rights organizations to try to force Egypt to respect the human rights conventions, and Egypt is a signatory for all these human rights conventions," Grace said. "Our aim is really that we want to call on all human rights groups in the civilized world, and all freedom-loving people. We want to incite them into action, to call Egyptian embassies, letting them know that [this] cannot happen in the 21st Century."

Grace told WND the boys already are serving as deacons in their Christian church, and have gone on Egyptian talk programs to express their dedication to Christianity. The Egyptian media, he said, has portrayed the situation as a mother applying pressure on her sons not to convert.

Their situation arose because of the Islamic law demand that children follow their father's faith if it is Islam. The nation's education ministry then requires children to take "and pass" a test on Islam in order for them to be advanced in school. No passing grade, no more schooling, Grace said.

"The whole Egyptian Coptic Christian people are praying and pleading with the conscience of all the human rights organizations, governments and public opinions of all the civilized world to contact the Egyptian embassies and demand that the Egyptian government stop torturing those two kids and their mother," Grace said.

The Middle East Review of International Affairs said the rise of Islam in Egypt arrived with Anwar Sadat's tenure.

"He then initiated what one could, in hindsight, term 'the Great Islamic Transformation' of Egypt. The first step was to stipulate in the Second Article of his new Constitution, promulgated in 1971 (long before Khomeini embarked on his Islamic revolutionary campaign), that the Principles of Islamic Shari'a were 'a main source' of legislation. In May 1981, the 'a' was replaced with 'the,' making Shari'a the term of reference for the entire constitution, meaning all other articles

were to be interpreted in that light," the organization said.

"The curricula of public schools, established by the Ministry of Education, ignore the Coptic era in Egypt's history. Courses glorifying Islam (the 'Only True Religion') and its history, while vilifying the crusaders (i.e. Christians) and the Jews, are imposed on all students," the group said.

"In the case of a father of a Christian family converting to Islam, his minor children are forced to follow suit: The mother's custody rights â€" a well established legal principle â€" are ignored in this case, as children, according to typical court rulings, are supposed to follow the 'better (or 'more noble') of the two religions," the group said.

There also are other indications that Egypt is not particularly tolerant of non-Muslims. An Egyptian Christian who had fled his home nation, "most assuredly has a right not to be tortured," a federal court ruled in allowing him to remain in the United States.

The court pointedly concluded that "diplomatic assurances" of his religious rights "by a country known to have engaged in torture" weren't reassuring.

A report from the Coalition for the Defense of Human Rights concluded Coptic Christians in Egypt have been harassed, tortured and killed by Muslims for 1,400 years.

"They have been subjected to all kinds of hate crimes including, the abduction of young Coptic girls, the killing of Coptic women and children and the destruction of their places of worship," the report concluded.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, an agency created by Congress, lists Egypt on its watch list of countries, noting it had "a poor overall human rights record."

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