

Jonathan Andrews; oral evidence summary

Registration system is at the root of persecution of converts and discrimination against Christians and churches and undermines the rule of law and fuels violence. It is a pluralism deficit. Terminology of majority/minority. Who is which? The latter gets exploited, marginalised and only gets given rights the majority choose to allow. But it is a very long-standing component of many multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies. Do Christians need defending or protecting? Difference of Christians from the society they are part of. Protectors from outside may be causing as much harm as in-region oppressors. The aim must be for them to be part of society with equal rights and status. Citizenship becoming the basis of society of the Arab Awakening.

Specifics religious registration, the court system, daily life. All affected, On a computer birth and ID cards. Across North Africa and Egypt there is the same system. Citizens are automatically presumed to be Muslim. Marriage automatically changes the wife's religion at marriage (cf Jordan) and it is not a matter of equal choice. Public sector employment is for valued subjects. Closed to minorities. Therefore they are disproportionately business owners in the private sector. eg problem of 'reconciliation meetings' after violence. Usually obliges the Christian to accept the terms of the majority community (Muslims) rather than requiring punishment of the Muslim perpetrators of violent attacks. It therefore exonerates violence and gives no recompense to victims. Only community harmony if there is unconditional surrender. End them therefore. Then if Middle East society flourishes so will the Christians, and vice versa.

Q Where did this registration system come from? It goes back to the Ottoman Empire, but was originally from Persia. From the Assyrians saying they were politically loyal, but wanted to keep their own religion and communication.

Q For Jordan & Egypt, any engagement with the FCO? None directly. The group I used to work for, Middle East Concern (MEC), have done.

Q Any recommendations for the FCO? No comment. But mileage in supporting specific cases (freeing people from jail) but also scope to deal with the root causes. The aspirations of the Arab Spring are still there. They want change, greater dignity, more and better jobs. State Department human rights report is the best resourced (but how accurate is it?). cf the Golan Heights situation.

The issue affecting Europe as a whole is migration. Addressing the economies of Middle Eastern countries can reduce the incentives to migrate. Human rights should be seen as a whole package. Economic detriment is a push factor to leave. Also Pakistan blasphemy laws. Plus forced marriage problem in Egypt.

Q The Gulf has narrowly defined citizenship. What should the FCO be doing? Some residents go for 20 years without citizenship. Human rights issues for migrant workers (domestic and construction). Marriage is a pressure point. As are birth certificates, school admissions. Turkey has removed religion from the face of its ID cards, but it is on the embedded chip. Would like religion to be just a matter of personal declaration. Examples of discrimination include Christian students being told they will get lower grades because they are Christians, but could get improved results if they converted. Also the burial problem. Can end up being refused burial in both Muslim and Christian cemeteries as not accepted as real followers by either side. From MEC years in Yemen there was a case resolved through the German Foreign Office, by giving aid with strings attached. Difficulties and complexities on who approves structural changes.