

# Egyptian Scholar Calls for Recognition of Ongoing People Power for Gender and Religious Equality

Mariz Tadros sees Religious Freedom and Gender Justice as Essential to Democracy

Jun 15, 2016, 13:25 ET from Christian Solidarity International (CSI) (<http://www.prnewswire.com/news/christian+solidarity+international+%28csi%29>)



ZURICH, June 15, 2016 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- "When we think of the Middle East these days, we don't think of resistance," Professor Mariz Tadros observed at a public lecture here Tuesday. "But people are resisting violations of their rights in the most powerful ways you could imagine. And they need solidarity!"

In a wide-ranging presentation hosted by Christian Solidarity International (CSI), Tadros examined the ways in which "ordinary people" have risen up in Egypt to confront two kinds of injustice: "religious oppression," where Christian Copts, Baha'is, Shi'ites and others "are being threatened and terrorized by mobs in their own communities," and "gender injustice, the way in which political struggles are being waged on women's bodies." Tadros called on the international community to pay attention to ordinary people's struggle for justice in Egypt, not just the actions of Islamists and the military.

To illustrate, Tadros pointed to two Egyptian women who were publicly brutalized in recent years – a pro-democracy protestor who was stripped of her veil and cloak and beaten by security forces in Tahrir Square in December 2011, and Soad Thabet, an elderly Coptic woman who was stripped naked and dragged through the street by a mob last month. Both attacks brought strong "bottom-up" responses from Egyptian society in support of women and Copts. In Thabet's case, Tadros noted, "exceptionally large numbers of Muslims" spoke out to demand justice.

Tadros took issue with claims that the elected-and-deposed Muslim Brotherhood government represented a transition to democracy and added, "We need to understand why people rose up against [Muslim Brotherhood President] Morsi."

Tadros noted that under Brotherhood rule, sexual harassment of women and discrimination against Copts "intensified" thanks to the "daily rhetoric and practice" of the exclusionary political movement in power, to the point that some food vendors began refusing to sell to Copts. "Winning a majority does not make for an inclusive regime," Tadros stated. "We must not assume that gender justice and religious freedom will come later, after we democratize. They are essential to any struggle for equality."

While the new Egyptian regime is "far from democratic, indeed, authoritarian," Tadros observed that "sexual harassment seems to have declined to a certain extent" and "social cohesion" between Christians and Muslims has improved in many communities.

Still, "severe encroachments" on inclusive politics remain, Tadros said, including so-called "blasphemy" laws used in a witch hunt-like manner, the spread of Saudi-funded radical Salafist movements in the country, restrictions on liberties, and weak implementation of the rule of law.

Expanding her talk to the broader region, particularly the war in Syria, Tadros encouraged the international community to learn lessons from the Egyptian case and recognize that a civil state also means a non-theocratic one, that election victories are no substitute for "inclusive and consensus-based

politics," and that "regional international power configurations," particularly the terrorist networks that have emerged from Libya to Syria since 2011, pose a real danger.

"In the midst of turbulence, we see ongoing struggles for dignity," Tadros concluded. "These struggles can change the path of a country's politics. Calls for accountability take different shapes and forms."

Tadros is the author of *Copts at the Crossroads*, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Contemporary Egypt*, and most recently, *Resistance, Revolt, and Gender Justice in Egypt*. Her talk was part of a continuing series hosted by CSI on the Future of Religious Minorities in the Middle East. A videorecording of the talk, along with all the other talks in the series, will be available at [www.middle-east-minorities.com](http://www.middle-east-minorities.com).

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