

Muslims petition Egypt not to include Shari'a

by [Omar Sacirbey](#) in the [September 5, 2012](#) issue

Muslim and Coptic Christian leaders in the U.S. are calling on the Egyptian government to exclude any mentions of Islamic law or language that discriminates against minorities in its draft constitution.

In a letter released August 7, the leaders urge the constitution writers to “recognize the equality of all Egyptians and to reject any language that would discriminate against any citizen of Egypt on the basis of that citizen’s religion or gender.” Because Egypt is home to millions of Christians, attempts to describe Islamic law, or Shari’a, as the source of the country’s law should also be rejected, the letter said.

Shari’a is interpreted differently by various schools within Islam; some Muslims believe Shari’a is a personal code that has no place in government, while in several Islamic countries—Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, Sudan and others—Shari’a infuses national law.

Egypt’s recently elected president, Mohamed Morsi, was backed by the Muslim Brotherhood but has pledged to be “the president of all Egyptians.”

Signatories of the letter include Rep. Keith Ellison (D., Minn.), the first Muslim elected to Congress; Imam Mohamed Magid, president of the Islamic Society of North America, the largest Muslim organization in America; and Hegomen Moises Bogdady and Michael Sorial, priests with the Coptic Orthodox Archdiocese of North America. The letter was sponsored by James J. Zogby’s Arab American Institute. The Egyptian embassy in Washington did not reply to requests for comment.

The letter represents an unusual move by U.S. Muslims to try to shape policy toward Muslims and non-Muslims in a Muslim-majority country like Egypt, especially against a backdrop of attempts in some 20 U.S. state legislatures to ban Shari’a from state courts.

The letter is also an important interfaith document between Muslims and Coptic Christians, whose relations have been strained in recent years. —RNS