



Sectarian incitement and attacks, 30 June to 9 July, 2013

Nagaa Hassan, Luxor governorate

On 4-5 July, Copts in Nagaa Hassan, part of the town of al-Dabaiya, west of Luxor, were subjected to ongoing assaults for an entire day after the dead body of Hassan Sidqi Hanafi, a Muslim, was found near the village canal behind the home of Mohamed Sayyed. The body was discovered Thursday, July 4 in the evening. Accounts of the circumstances surrounding the killing and the extent of involvement by Christians differ, but the family of the deceased accused a Christian, Sobhi Magdi Eskander, 18, of killing Hanafi. At dawn on Friday, Eskander was beaten with clubs and stabbed before escaping from his assailants and heading home. He called Christian religious leaders for help, who in turned contacted security forces. A relative of Eskander, Shenouda, was also beaten and then thrown in the Nile, but he managed to swim away and evade his attackers. A police vehicle arrived and informed the crowd that Eskander had been killed. It then took him to the Luxor hospital and later the Assyout hospital for treatment.

Eyewitnesses and victims' families told EIPR researchers in Luxor that several hundred local Muslims were beating on the doors of Christian homes and attempted to storm them, carrying firearms, bladed weapons and tools and shouting hostile, sectarian chants. Church leaders in al-Dabaiya contacted the local police station and were told that the police were awaiting reinforcements from the Bayadiya district. A force later arrived, but it was inadequate to deal with the growing crowd. At the same time, random attacks on Christian homes occurred throughout the day, from the morning until 6 pm, and several homes were torched. Some homes were attacked more than once. For example, at 5 am on Friday, the home of victim Emile Nessim—a member of the Tamarrod campaign of no relation to Eskander—was attacked when the assailants broke the door and burned the window. The assailants then returned at 1 pm, and at 7 pm, several members of the crowd went up to the building roof and threw a butane canister inside. Nessim attempted to hide in a large sack, but the attackers found him and beat him with pieces of iron; he was taken to the hospital, where he later died, and his home was burned to the ground.

While this was happening, Christians left their homes and sought refuge in the al-Dabaiya church or neighboring villages. Others were unable to leave their homes, which were surrounded by mobs of local Muslims firing guns in the air and trying to force their way in. The assaults became fiercer



from 6 to 7 pm, when attempts to storm Christian homes increased.

An armored police vehicle arrived on the scene and tried to convince the crowd to return home, but they refused. The crowd allowed Christian women to leave their homes, ostensibly to protect them, after which police extracted the women from the homes under siege, in particular the houses belonging to Nashi Habib and Rassem Tawadros, and took them to the Mar Yuhanna Church in Dabaiya. Security forces refused to help the men out; one man even dressed in women's clothing, but when he was discovered by security, they refused to take him with them.

In video testimonies, the mother of two victims and the wife of a third said that security forces refused to allow the men into the armored police vehicle, agreeing only to move the women, which therefore facilitated the attacks on the women's relatives. Other eyewitnesses said that a guard and a junior policeman took part in the attacks.

The testimony of Habib Nashi Habib, whose brother was killed and who himself barely escaped death, indicates clear collusion by security forces:

“When the government came, we let them in and they told us they were only taking the women, so we went and dressed in women's clothes. When the police recognized each of us, they would say, ‘You're a man, stand aside.’ It was me, Muharib, Romani, Emile, Rassem and Milad. After the government took the women out, they let the crowd in. When I saw the door open, I ran for the bathroom and jumped into the building's airshaft. I hid there in the dark and heard them say, ‘There is no god but God,’ and I heard slamming and things breaking. I knew them from their voices...All of them came in and broke things. I heard the voice of police sitting outside and I heard one of them say, ‘Come on, finish it up. We let you in, so finish up.’ The officer came in and looked around and saw them finishing up.”

This pattern of Muslims storming the homes of Christians in the presence of security forces was observed elsewhere. The following people were killed:

1. Romani Nashi Habib, 38, stabbed and his throat cut.
2. Muharib Nashi Habib, 40, stabbed in the neck and skull fractures.
3. Rassem Tawadros Aqladios, 54, stabbed in the neck and beaten with clubs, causing skull fractures.



4. Emile Nessim Serufim, 40, skull lacerations.

The following people were injured:

1. Milad al-Amir Nessim, 25, stabbed and beaten with clubs.
2. Boulos Zaki Youssef, 50, shot four times in the arm and stomach.
3. Fadi Asaad Abdullah, 30, beaten with clubs.
4. Eid Edward Ayoub, 36, beaten with clubs.
5. Safwat Samir Ayoub, 36, beaten with clubs.

The homes of several local Copts were robbed and set on fire, which consumed the remaining contents, while several other empty Christian homes were looted. Fire trucks and ambulances were prevented from entering the village, and the dead and wounded were taken away in police vehicles. The attached appendix details the extent of damage done to the 21 homes that were attacked.

During the events, religious leaders called for a larger security presence in the village and protection for Christians, but their pleas were ignored. As one priest said, “There was no concern or care for us and what was happening in the village.” Military police forces arrived on the following morning, Saturday, arrested some 25 local Muslims and another 17 the next day, and filed report no. 2398/2012/administrative/Gurna district. The Public Prosecution ordered 16 suspects detained for four days pending investigation. Families of victims also identified some assailants who had taken part in the attacks, but they have not yet been arrested (names are withheld in fear of retaliatory attacks on victims’ families). Despite the relative calm in the area at the time this report was being drafted, some 100 families have been displaced from their homes.

Dilga, Deir Mawas district, southern Minya governorate

Starting on 30 June and for several days thereafter, the town of Dilga, located in southern Minya, saw sectarian attacks following widespread participation in demonstrations and marches opposed to former President Mohamed Morsy. On Sunday and Monday, local Muslim youths and children roamed the streets repeating sectarian chants, banging on the doors and windows of some Christian homes and pelting them with rocks. The marches ended without clashes or injuries on either side. A small police force—six soldiers and a guard—were assigned to guard the local church.

At approximately 10 am on Wednesday, 3 July, following the statement by General Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, several hundred village Muslims attacked the event hall of the Mar Girgis Coptic Catholic



Church, chanting “Islamic, Islamic, we want legitimacy” and “What humiliation, what shame, the Christians have become revolutionaries.” The crowd brutally beat the head guard, a Muslim, prompting the other police guards to leave their post at the church. The crowd then stormed the three-story building (a nursery and offices on the first floor, a library on the second and the residence of Father Ayoub Youssef on the third). The mob looted the building and then set it on fire, which destroyed the entirety of the first floor.

In the meantime, Copts remained in their homes. The crowd split into several groups and began roaming the village streets, terrorizing Christians by banging on their doors and windows with stones and iron rods and attacking and looting some houses. According to testimonies, homes and shops belonging to Girgis Fahim, Cromer Ishaq, Salama Ishaq and Nadi Muhanni were looted. As soon as the latter’s home was stormed, he began shooting from the roof, injuring six of the assailants, one of whom later died. The attackers then pulled the man’s wife out the house and shot her—she is currently undergoing treatment at the Good Shepherd Hospital—and set fire to the house. In the midst of these events, both Youssef Gindi and Michel Gamil were forced to break the crosses drawn on their houses after the contents of their homes were destroyed.

Another group of Muslims attacked the Islah Church and looted it after breaking down the doors, while other local citizens cut the road to the village and prevented police and fire trucks from entering.

As soon as the events began, Father Ayoub Youssef called army and police officials for help, asking them to quickly dispatch forces to protect the building and village Copts, but security forces did not arrive until 5 am. Police removed the priest from the nearby house where he had hidden and arrested an unknown number of Christians and Muslims. The next day, July 4, Mina Nadi Sadeq was stabbed in the neck below his ear while walking down the street and taken to the hospital for treatment.

Sources said that the village is tense and that some persons affiliated with Islamist movements are inciting against Copts. The same sources named a local pharmacist who used a megaphone on his pharmacy to call on Muslim townspeople to aid Islam and seek vengeance against local Christians “who had brought Morsy down.” On Friday afternoon, another village resident used the megaphone at the Nasr Mosque to urge village Muslims to attack Christians, claiming they attacked Morsy supporters who had gathered on the train tracks and prevented trains from moving. Some well-



known local figures intervened to calm residents and tell them that Christians were not responsible for the latest political events.

It should be noted that this is not the first time the local Catholic church was attacked; on 11 November 2012, several of its Muslim neighbors demolished the church wall, claiming it had encircled some of their own property. The public solicitor of the Southern Minya Prosecution later allowed the church to rebuild the wall, after ascertaining that it possesses the official deed to the land.

North Sinai governorate

On Saturday morning, 6 July, two masked men shot Father Mina Abboud Sharubim in the Masaid area of Arish, located in North Sinai, while the priest was driving from his home to the Mar Mina Church. According to Father Youssef Sobhi, a priest at the North Sinai Bishopric, Sharubim was shot 12 times in the head and chest, killing him immediately. The perpetrators fled the scene in Sharubim's car, which later broke down.

On the evening of the same day, unknown assailants kidnapped Magdi Lamai Habib, an electronic goods retailer, under threat of arms while Habib was in the Tuesday market in the city of Sheikh Zuwayd.

Some Christian clerics said they were afraid to go out in public amid the campaigns of incitement and the flyers being distributed by takfiri groups; they added that the churches in the governorate are closed most of the time due to the lack of any security presence.

It is noteworthy that nearby Rafah saw an increase in sectarian tensions in mid-September 2012 that prompted Copts to leave for Arish and other areas. Following pressure from the media and rights groups, governorate officials intervened to keep Christians in Rafah and provide them with protection.

Church of the Virgin in Marsa Matrouh

On Wednesday evening, 3 July, hundreds of supporters of former President Mohamed Morsy in Marsa Matrouh attacked the Coptic Orthodox Church of the Virgin in the city. They first fired shots in the air before setting fire to the guard kiosk outside the church gates and its electrical cable. They then demolished parts of the church's iron gate with tools in their possession and threw stones and



Molotovs at the church, setting fire to several windows.

As soon as the events began, Father Begimi, the church priest who was inside the building at the time, called army forces and firefighters, who came about 20 minutes later. Security forces dispersed the crowd in front of the church and reinforced the church guard detail.

In a statement to the EIPR, the priest said that the next day, some prominent Salafis told worshippers at the nearby Fath Mosque not to attack churches.

Mar Mina Church, Port Said governorate

At midnight on Tuesday, 9 July, masked men opened fire on the Mar Mina Church in the Manakh area of the Port Said governorate, shattering the glass facade of the pharmacy of the adjacent Mar Mina Charitable Hospital; Michael Sanad and Peter Halim were lightly injured by glass shards. According to church officials, there were very few worshippers in the church, due to directives from religious leaders that citizens only come to church for religious services. According to several media reports, security forces stationed at the church exchanged gunfire with the masked men and arrested one of them, but the EIPR has not yet been able to confirm this.

Attempted attacks

A pro-Morsy march on Thursday, 4 July, pelted the Mar Mina Church in the city of Minya with stones, but some participants in the march intervened to put an end to it. On Sunday, 7 July, a distinctive mark was placed on a Coptic-owned shop, allegedly as part of the incitement campaign against Copts. Several political parties in Minya issued statements about the incident, and the Destour Party in the city said that Islamists had marked several Coptic shops in Balas Square, the largest square in the governorate, to distinguish them from other shops in preparation for an attack. An Orthodox Coptic orphanage was also painted with a black mark.

On 4 July, dozens of supporters of former President Mohamed Morsy gathered at the Qena Bishopric, but security forces turned them back; three shops owned by Copts were partially vandalized.

On July 5, hundreds of people attempted to storm the Orthodox Coptic Bishopric in downtown Luxor; tear gas was used to disperse them and prevent them from reaching the building.

Inflammatory flyers



On 5 July, flyers were distributed in North Sinai signed by “the Supporters of Sharia in Egypt.” The flyers said that Nazarenes, a derogatory term for Christians, had “declared war on Islam and its people in Egypt and transformed the country of Islam, its seat and secure fortress, into a secular, Crusader beast where the banner of Islam is not raised.” The flyer added that Christians were “targeting the lives and property of Muslims and every bearded man and fully veiled woman and attacking the sanctity of mosques. Churches have become citadels and arms warehouses.”

In the run-up to the protests of 30 June, a statement was distributed in the Minya governorate titled “A Message to Christians,” threatening attacks and the burning of Coptic property and churches. “If you’re going out on 30/6 to set the country on fire with shotguns and Molotovs, know that a liter of gasoline can burn up your gold shops and maybe homes and churches,” the statement said. “If you’re not afraid of any of that, be afraid for your children and your home.” The flyer was signed “Concerned People of the Country.”

Threatening flyers were also distributed in Beni Soueif prior to the 30 June demonstrations, titled “Think, Muslim; Wake up, Christian.” The flyer stated, “Why do you think Christians want to gather on 30 June in front of the Ittihadiya [Presidential Palace]? Why do you think the church is gathering all the Christians? Because the president is from the Muslim Brotherhood, or because he’s a Muslim and wants to apply religion? Because they hate Morsy or they hate Islam? Talk to your Christian neighbors and those you buy from...and tell them to mind their neighbors and not to listen to Tawadros and Ghabriyal who want to set the country on fire. If the country burns, it will touch everyone.”

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