



Background

1. Conviction of Demiana Abd al-Nour on defamation charges

Demiana Obeid Abd al-Nour, a teacher at the Sheikh Sultan Primary School in the Luxor governorate, in the village of Al-Toud in the Adasat district, was arrested after a student's parent filed a complaint against her accusing her of defaming Islam while teaching a lesson comparing religions in the ancient world, the medieval period and the modern age, as required by the social studies curriculum. The school administration conducted an internal investigation, questioning several students, most of whom denied the allegations in the complaint.

The Public Prosecution issued an arrest warrant for Abd al-Nour on 4 May 2013, and she appeared for questioning on 8 May, when the prosecution ordered her detained for four days pending investigation. She appeared before a summary judge on 11 May for a remand hearing, and the judge ruled to extend remand for an additional 15 days; she was later released on bail of LE20,000. The Luxor Summary Court fined her LE100,000 on 11 June 2013, after the prosecution charged her with misdemeanor defamation of Islam under Article 61 of the Penal Code, although the statute sets forth a penalty of imprisonment and/or a minimum fine of LE100 and a maximum fine of LE500. The court thus deviated from the text of the law by issuing such an excessive sentence. Both the defendant and the prosecution appealed; the appellate court sentenced her to six months in prison.

The Administrative Prosecution also investigated the incident, filing a brief in which it recommended sanctions against two teachers—Abd al-Fattah Gomaa Hamed and Mahmoud Ahmed al-Adawi—because they signed the names of ten parents to the complaint against Abd al-Nour, although the parents were not present at the school and did not sign the complaint. The school principal and several teachers and students denied the allegations to the administrative investigative authorities. The principal accused 13 teachers, whom he described as “militant,” of being behind the complaint and ginning up the controversy.



2. Six months in prison for two citizens in Luxor on charges of defaming Islam

On 13 April 2014, the Luxor Appellate Misdemeanor Court, presided over by Judge Ahmed Abd al-Maqsoud, ruling in case no. 672/2014, sentenced Shahira Mohamed Ahmed Suleiman and Khalifa Mohamed Khair to six months in prison on the charge of defaming Islam and ordered them to pay all court costs.

Security forces arrested Suleiman, a 38-year-old art teacher at the German University, and Khair, the 65-year-old supervisor of workers at the Luxor Temple, on 14 February in the village of Toub, located in the southern Luxor governorate.

The Public Prosecution questioned the two and ordered them detained for four days pending investigation, after charging them with exploiting religion to propagate extremist ideas by word and deed, with intent to inflame strife and traduce and defame a revealed religion (Islam). The first defendant was also charged for not possessing an identification card and failing to file an application with the Civil Registry to obtain another. The prosecution asked that the defendants be sentenced under Article 98(f) of the Penal Code.

According to the investigation report of Major Mohamed Osama, an officer with Homeland Security in Luxor, Suleiman propagated beliefs that defame Islam and mock its religious rites. She exploited the ignorance of some local residents and urged them to fast in a month other than Ramadan, make the pilgrimage to saints' tombs in Cairo instead of the Kaaba in Mecca and not supplicate God; she also claimed that the female body was not shameful. The defendant used the home of the second defendant to spread these ideas when she found some acceptance of them.

The public solicitor of the Luxor Prosecutions set a date of 19 February for an expedited trial. The first-instance Luxor misdemeanor court acquitted the two defendants of the defamation charges and fined Suleiman LE100 for not possessing an ID card; the Public Prosecution appealed the sentence. The defendants' families said



they were mistreated by the security force that arrested them and took them away at 1 am in their sleeping wear.

In its judgment, the Luxor Appellate Court said that it was persuaded that the defendants had committed the crime based on the statements of three witnesses and State Security investigations. These showed that the defendants propagated ideas that infringed firm principles of Islamic law enshrined in the Quran and Sunna and eroded Islamic values.

3. Armant Misdemeanor Court in Luxor tries Kirolos Shawqi on defamation charges

The Armant Misdemeanor Court adjourned the trial of Kirolos Shawqi Atallah, accused of defaming Islam on a Facebook page for the Knights of the Cross, until 24 June.

The case began when several local Muslims who work in Saudi Arabia contacted the defendant's relatives to express their anger and concern for Shawqi's use of the "like" feature to mark an item published on a Facebook page that defames the prophet. When news of the incident spread and reached officials at the Armant police station, the station head contacted the village guard, Butros, also Shawqi's uncle, to inquire about Shawqi and ask him to come in and resolve the matter. Shawqi and his uncle went to the Luxor security directorate without a lawyer, and security officials filed a police report on 28 May. That evening, many local residents gathered and some young people incited them to attack the homes of the town's Christians. Fearing attacks, three cars of Central Security Forces and two police vehicles arrived, along with several local notables, to calm matters. Police arrested two Muslims from the same village, releasing them later the same day in an effort to calm tension.

Shawqi was insulted and assaulted in the Luxor police station, where he was slapped on the face and forced to stand against the wall with his arms raised for more than two hours.



The grand sheikh of al-Azhar sent a delegation of 16 Azhar scholars and endowment officials to the village to give the Friday sermon on 30 May on tolerance and Islam, non-violence and respecting others, in an effort to calm sentiment in the village.

The Egyptian Family House in the Luxor governorate organized a customary reconciliation session with several Azhar scholars and priests from the Armant district and security leaders. During the meeting, priests apologized for the events and agreed to temporarily close a guesthouse, used by village Christians for religious lessons, for several months, until the air cleared. Local Copts visited all the families in the village and offered an apology for the incident.

At dawn on Monday, 2 June 2014, unknown persons in the nearby village of Mahamid broke the main electrical transformer, cutting off electricity in the area. Ten minutes later, a fire started in a stack of wood in front of a carpentry shop, owned by Seifein Abd al-Malak. As the fire spread, local residents rushed to put it out. An angry mob then set fire to the Romani carpentry shop, which consumed the wood and a horse cart and blew out the tires, waking the rest of the town, which rushed to put out the flames. A clothing shop owned by Romani Gohar was also torched, as was a tok-tok owned by Malak Abadi. Fire trucks came to extinguish the last of the flames; several security leaders also came to the village and filed an incident report.¹

On 29 May, the Armant Prosecution questioned Kirolos Shawqi and placed him in pretrial detention pending investigation. On 1 June, Luxor Public Solicitor Walid al-Biali referred Shawqi to misdemeanor court, charging him with defaming Islam and publishing defamatory images. An expedited hearing was scheduled for 3 June 2014.

In the first trial session, the defendant's attorney, Mohamed Abd al-Aal, argued for the invalidity of the investigations, lack of material evidence and lack of connection between the charge and the description of the crime. He also argued that civil lawyers

¹ The EIPR relied on a statement from Luxor activist Safwat Samaan.



should be denied standing to argue against the defendant because the prosecution has sole jurisdiction over the case. He further argued that the interrogation was invalid because it violated Article 124 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, since no lawyer was present during questioning, although the Lawyers Syndicate had been notified. In addition, he said, the defendant had not been apprehended during the commission of the crime, since neither printed material or publications had been seized, nor even a computer or mobile phone allegedly used to publish the images. Moreover, Homeland Security had provided no information about the Knights of the Cross page. In addition, the case had no basis in the law, the lawyer argued, and even with the defendant's statements, since he has weak eyesight and night blindness, for which he was disqualified from military service. The defamatory image submitted in the case, allegedly linked to the defendant, came from Homeland Security and was not posted on Shawqi's page. The lawyer stated that the defendant had no knowledge of the image except by way of the torrent of abuse and threats he received by phone.

Reports confirm that tension still prevails in the area and Christians in the village of North Mahamid and South Mahamid continue to be verbally harassed. Several fires have also been set in front of their homes and in their livestock pens, while the security apparatus has arrested neither the assailants nor the instigators of the attacks.