

Egypt: Catalogue of Cases in 2012

1. Summary and conclusions

Attacks against the Coptic community, which rose substantially during 2011, continued in 2012. Although at the beginning of the year, leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood congratulated the Coptic community during the Orthodox Christmas celebrations, the Salafi movement very pointedly did not, and were again at the forefront of hostility targeting the Christian community. Threats and violence against the Coptic community, which have been particularly marked in Upper Egypt, include inequality before the law; pressure on churches with regard to construction, ownership or repair of buildings; abductions of female minors; murder; the torching of homes and businesses, as well as the anti-Christian rhetoric by Muslim brotherhood spokesmen, Salafis and senior Islamic clergy. This has been exacerbated by a continuing climate of impunity where perpetrators continue to commit crimes without prosecution. In addition, an increase in charges of blasphemy, insulting religion has occasioned problems not only for Christians, but also for atheists, moderate Muslims and those not adhering to Sunni Islam.

Given the country's strategic and regional importance, key international actors must maintain focus on events in Egypt and assist in ensuring the emergence of a just and equitable society. It is vital that the Government of Egypt is encouraged to secure civil rights and religious freedom for all of the nation's citizens. This can best be accomplished by:

- Consulting widely to ensure that the constitution conforms to international statutes to which Egypt is party, and that the document becomes an inclusive and genuine reflection of popular consensus, and is no longer a source of continuing tensions;
- Penalising the use of inflammatory sectarian rhetoric, and ensuring that statements in Arabic are reflective of declarations of unity and equality made in English (cf. see under December in the catalogue);
- Upholding equality before the law for all religious groups, including Bahai's and Shias, with respect to recognition, registration, regulation, and the establishment and maintenance of places of worship;
- Ensuring the right of all citizens to freedom of expression and opinion (as per article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ICCPR) and the right to adopt a religion or belief of their choice without fear of sanctions. The latter includes the right to believe or not to believe, and the right to change one's religion;
- Ensuring that all citizens are able, either individually or in common with others and in public or private, to manifest their religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching, as outlined in the ICCPR and the Declaration of the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief;
- Responding promptly and effectively to violence against members of religious minorities, and ensuring that actual perpetrators are apprehended and punished, and victims are compensated;
- Recognising the equal dignity of women by ensuring an end to gender-based discrimination or violence, and enacting legislation to protect women and girls from abduction and sexual harassment.

2. Events during 2012

January 2012

Coptic millionaire accused of 'blasphemy and insulting Islam'

On 9 January, Naguib Sawiris, a Coptic telecoms mogul and billionaire, was charged with 'blasphemy and insulting Islam'. Sawiris sparked much controversy by tweeting cartoons of Mickey and Minnie Mouse in traditional Islamic dress, with a message that cartoon characters would be forced to dress conservatively if Islamists took power. Sawiris apologised, but the case was nonetheless filed by Mamduh Ismail, an Islamist lawyer who has known links with Islamic Jihad and who has been investigated due to alleged links with Al-Qaeda. The case was dismissed by the court on the grounds that the individuals who filed the report had no legal standing. ¹

Attack in Qena Province, Upper Egypt

On January 20, a mob attack was carried out on the Coptic community in Rahmaniya-Kebly village in Qena Province, Upper Egypt, in which homes, huts and shops were destroyed, allegedly in the presence of the security forces. Coptic residents, who make up 50 % of the local population, claim the violence was provoked by Salafis who successfully prevented them from voting in the parliamentary elections. ²

Abu Makka Church

On 20 January, a group of Salafis and Muslim Brotherhood members reportedly informed the congregation of Abu Makka church in Bahteem, Shubra-el-Khayman in Qaliubia Province that the church should be closed because it had no licence, and was suitable for use as a mosque and hospital.³

Court ruling on kidnapped/missing Coptic girl

An Egyptian court ruled on 25 January that a Coptic minor from Saft-el-Khamar village, who had been missing for over 40 days, should remain in a state-owned care home until she turns 18, instead of being returned to her parents. The prosecutor, who was allegedly backed by twelve Salafi lawyers, contended that 16 year old Amira Gamal Saber, who disappeared after a school lesson, had expressed a desire to convert to Islam. In a comment to AINA, Coptic activist Dr. Oliver stated that the prosecutor had effectively "legitimized child abduction and detention". ⁴

Father and son shot dead in Nag Hammadi, Upper Egypt

On 26 January, two Copts, a father and son, were shot dead in the Bahgourah suburb of Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt for refusing to pay extortion money to a local gang. Four days earlier, the gang's leader, Ahmed Saber, had demanded a large sum of protection money from Moawad Assad Samaan, a contractor, who refused to oblige. He and his son, Assad Moawad, were subsequently cut down by machine gun fire, prompting a protest from thousands of Copts outside the government building in Nag Hammadi, demanding protection for the Coptic community. Moawad's second son, Paulos, survived the attack. According to Bishop Kyrillos of Nag Hammadi, Ahmed Saber had been extorting money from members of the Coptic community since last year, was well known to the

¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/28/egypt-court-sawiris-idAFL5E8DS4TT20120228>

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/15/188389.html> - (AFP)

http://www.christiantoday.com/article/coptic_christian_on_trial_over_mickey_mouse_cartoon/29157.htm

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-16473759>

² <http://www.aina.org/news/2012011921919.htm>

³ <http://www.aina.org/news/2012011921919.htm>

⁴ <http://www.aina.org/news/20120124192832.htm>

police, and had kidnapped several children for ransom. "Police have received numerous complaints about these crimes. I do not understand why they have not arrested him." ⁵

Mob attack in Kobry-el-Sharbat, Alexandria

On 28 January, a mob several thousand strong is reported to have attacked Copts in the village of Kobry-el-Sharbat in Alexandria. The mob looted Coptic homes and churches before setting them ablaze. The violence followed the usual pattern of collective punishment in that it was triggered by an unsubstantiated rumour, namely that a Coptic man, Mourad Samy Guirgis, had an intimate picture of a Muslim woman on his mobile phone. Mr. Guirgis' home was amongst those torched, and he is reported to have surrendered himself to the police to ensure his own protection. According to Ramy Kamel, a Human Rights activist, Mahmoud Te'ma spread the rumours after unsuccessfully trying to extort money from Guirgis. Others who lost their homes are reported to have left the village. According to a local priest, the security forces were called, but arrived very late, made no arrests, and instead begged the mob to return to their homes. In addition, the fire brigade was prevented from entering the village until the fires had burned themselves out. Two Coptic men and a Muslim man were injured in the violence. Radical Muslims called for all 62 Coptic families to be evicted from the village. A Muslim tribunal on 1 February called for the eviction of eight Coptic families from the village. The decree was later overturned by a Parliamentary Commission, composed of two Copts, two liberals, and Salafi members of Parliament. According to Sheikh Sherif Hawary, who was responsible for the tribunal, Mourad Guirgis' family would not return. ⁶

Law suit filed against Salafi preacher for incitement

In a significant development on 26 January, prominent Egyptian blogger and political activist Mahmoud Salem, also known as "Sandmonkey" after his blog entitled "*The Rantings of a Sandmonkey*", filed a law suit against the influential Salafi preacher Yasser al-Bourhami for inciting violence against Coptic Christians. Had it been successful, the case would have constituted a significant advance in efforts to combat impunity, discrimination and religious intolerance. However, the Free Egyptians Party (FEP), headed by Salem, made it clear that they did not expect any follow-up on the case, due to complicity between Muslim extremists and state institutions. The case was dismissed. ⁷

Coptic student to be held for fifteen days over images deemed offensive

In the latest development of a December 2011 case, a prosecutor in Assiut called for a Coptic student to be held for fifteen days for allegedly posting offensive images of Prophet Mohammed on-line. The student denied the allegations, and claimed that the pictures had been shared on his Facebook page without his knowledge. A meeting of Muslims, Copts, Islamist MPs and the governor of Assiut called for the student and his family to move out of the area, and for priests to publicly apologise for the images. According to an AINA news report, the student's family moved out of the area while he was incarcerated, and Muslim students burned three Coptic houses in Baheeg, a village in Assiut. According to Al-Masry Al-Youm (Egypt Independent), at least six Coptic houses were set on fire after the incident was publicized. ⁸

February 2012

Two Coptic priests charged over Maspero Massacre

⁵ <http://www.aina.org/news/20120126173659.htm>
<http://english.ahram.org/NewsContent/1/64/32940/Egypt/Politics-/Killing-of-Copts-in-Upper-Egypt-turns-up-heat-on-p.aspx>

⁶ <http://www.aina.org/news/20120208194830.htm> <http://www.aina.org/news/20120127193942.htm>,
<http://www.aina.org/news/20120208194830.htm> <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/jan/30/selma-on-the-nile/> <http://www.aina.org/news/20120218175955.htm> <http://www.aina.org/news/20120208194830.htm>

⁷ <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/blogger-filed-incitement-suit-against-salafi-preacher>

⁸ <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/muslim-villagers-burn-houses-upper-egypt-christian-family>
<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/student-be-held-15-days-over-images-prophet-mohamed>
<http://www.aina.org/news/20120102212906.htm>

In another worrying development relating to the Maspero Massacre, Father Matthias Nasr Manqarious of Ezbet el-Nakhl and Father Filopateer Gamel of Giza appeared before a court on 9 February on several charges relating to the events of October 2011, including causing the death of a military soldier, possession of weapons, use of force against the military, attempting to storm the Maspero TV building, and incitement to violence. Father Nasr claims that this is another instance of the victims becoming the accused, “while the real perpetrators are ruling the country and continuing with their crimes against the Egyptian people and peaceful demonstrators everywhere”.

Father Gameel had submitted evidence against several high ranking officials, accusing them of being responsible for the Maspero Massacre, but received a response from the judge that due to their position as high ranking military officials they can only be tried by a military court.

Coptic attorney Dr. Naguib Gabriel, a notable Human Rights lawyer, and the head of the Egyptian Union of Human Rights Organisation, was due to appear before prosecutors on 11 February, also in connection with the Maspero Massacre. The three have been prevented from leaving the country.⁹

20,000-strong mob attempt to kill pastor and torch church

On 15 February, a mob of several thousand mainly Salafi Muslims attempted to break into and torch the Church of St Mary and St Abram in Meet Bashar, Zagazig, Sharqia Province. A Coptic home nearby was torched, as were three cars. The crowd were demanding the return of Rania Khalil Ibrahim, 15, a Coptic-born girl who had converted to Islam after her Muslim convert father had taken custody of her. After her father arranged for her to marry a Muslim man, she went to live with her Coptic mother. A Coptic member of Parliament spoke to Prime Minister El-Ganzoury, who ordered reinforcements to the area. They dispersed the crowd and agreed to stay in the town for two weeks. A mob of 2000 had gathered on 14 February throwing rocks at the home of Reverend Guirgis Gamel, pastor of the church. They returned in greater numbers after hearing that Rania refused to return to live with her father.¹⁰

Egyptian security forces prevent Christian protesters from reaching Parliament

Egyptian police are reported to have forcibly prevented a group of Coptic protesters from reaching the Egyptian Parliament building on 13 February. The group was protesting against the eviction of eight Coptic families from their homes in Alexandria. The protest was staged after a message submitted by Coptic parliamentarian Dr Emal Gad to the Parliament Speaker was felt to have been ignored.¹¹

March 2012

Maspero priest jailed for six months and fined

In worrying developments, Rev. Makarios Bolous, pastor of St George’s Church in Aswan Province, was sentenced to six months prison and fined £300 for violations of the height of St George’s church on 6 March 2012. The court also ordered the removal of the excessive height. St George’s was the location of the torching which led to the Maspero violence of October 2011, during which 28, mostly Coptic Christians, were killed when the military opened fire and ran over protesters following peaceful demonstrations. Since this attack on the community not one member of the armed forces has yet to be convicted. Since St George’s was destroyed more than four months previously it had yet to be rebuilt, despite the Head of Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), Field Marshal Tantawi, ordering the Governor of Aswan to rebuild the church at the expense of the government.

⁹ <http://www.aina.org/news/20120210142736.htm> <http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/egypt/2980>

¹⁰ <http://www.aina.org/news/20120214194904.htm> <http://www.katholisches.info/2012/02/15/kirche-und-hauser-der-kopten-von-islamischen-salafiten-niedergebrannt/> <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Sharqia:-Church-and-homes-set-on-fire-by-some-2,000-Muslim-extremists-23985.html>

¹¹ <http://www.aina.org/news/20120213160733.htm>

As it stands, church members are not permitted to pray, worship or go near the site by order of the authorities. ¹²

Anti-Christianisation course to be held in Aswan University

According to an unconfirmed Bikya Masr report, a course designed to educate youth about Islam and teach them how to respond to attempted conversion will be taught in Aswan, Southern Egypt. According to coordinator Ibrahim al-Etmany, the course was proposed in response to alleged attempts to convert Muslims to Christianity. Ibrahim declares himself to be for “civil and enlightened dialogue between the two religions”, but against “confrontations and provocative talk”. ¹³

Nuns threatened in Upper Egypt

According to a Compass Direct News report, on 4 March, a mob of 1,500 Muslim villagers, brandishing weapons that included swords and knives, surrounded the guesthouse of the privately run Notre Dame Language School in the village of Abu Al-Reesh in Aswan Province, threatening to burn two nuns who were trapped outside. The nuns had been accused of building a church on the site of the school. The mob returned the next day, resulting in attendance at the school dropping by a third. The two nuns suffered cuts and bruises after being trapped in the building for over eight hours and were taken to a Catholic Church in Aswan immediately after their ordeal. It is understood that one of the nuns was hospitalised in Cairo after suffering a major nervous breakdown. Magdy Melad, the schools’ governor, refused demands that he sign over deeds to land including the guesthouse which was attacked. ¹⁴

Christian sentenced to 6 years in prison for ‘insulting the prophet’

In the latest in a string of ‘defamation of religion’ cases, an Egyptian Christian is appealing a sentence of six years in prison for ‘insulting the Prophet’. The judge was accused of ruling to appease a large mob that had gathered outside the court to demand the death penalty for Makram Diab Said, the defendant. Diab’s lawyer, Ahmad Sayed Gabali, reported that 80 Islamist lawyers filled the court, preventing him from representing his client. The mob protested that no Muslim can defend a Christian, but when Coptic lawyers volunteered, they too were denied entry. Human rights groups were also forced to leave the courtroom.

Diab, a school secretary, had been in a heated discussion on 9 February with a Salafi school teacher, and a complaint was filed two weeks later by Abdel-Hamid, a teacher at the same school, who had not been in school on that day. The complaint was signed by eleven other teachers, and some teachers went on strike until he was arrested and prosecuted. ¹⁵

Priest sentenced and fined for excess church height

Makarios Boulos, priest of St George’s Church in Elmarinab, Edfu (Aswan province) was sentenced to six months in prison and fined £300 for contravening regulations relating to the height of the church building. The court refused to take into consideration documents presented by Rev. Makarios’ lawyer, which show that the architect and building contractor are responsible for the removal of excess height, and not Rev. Makarios.

¹² <http://www.aina.org/news/20120306013944.htm> <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Egyptians-tired-of-Salafists-and-Muslim-Brotherhood,-says-Coptic-bishop-24161.html>

http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/egypt/article_1436277.html

¹³ <http://www.bikyamasr.com/60238/anti-christianization-course-in-egypt-aims-to-combat-conversion/>

¹⁴ http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/egypt/article_1449790.html

http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/egypt/article_1512686.html

¹⁵ <http://www.aina.org/news/20120315194739.htm> <http://www.opendoorsusa.org/pray/prayer-updates/2012/05-May/Christian's-Six-Year-Sentence-Upheld-Egypt>

<http://www.aina.org/news/20120304191519.htm>
<http://www.aina.org/news/20120301144217.htm>

In September 2011, Rev. Makarios agreed to Muslim demands to strip the church of certain symbols, but the Muslims present at the meeting subsequently returned, demanding removal of the domes, and threatening to destroy the church. A Muslim mob had torched the same church on 30 September 2011. ¹⁶

April 2012

Three months for actor and director for insulting Islam

A three month sentence that was handed to Adel Imam, a prominent actor and director, for blasphemy, insulting Islam, offending its symbols, and mocking the authorities was upheld. Mr. Imam was initially found guilty in absentia in February after an Islamist lawyer brought the case against him. His lawyer confirmed he would appeal the sentence and the fine of \$170 (£105). ¹⁷

Coptic Orthodox Church withdraws from Constitution talks

On 2 April the Coptic Orthodox Church withdrew from negotiations over the new Egyptian Constitution, citing the Islamist domination of the drafting body. This followed the withdrawal of several liberal parties and public figures from the talks, as well as that of Al-Azhar University. ¹⁸

The Egyptian judiciary subsequently suspended the commission tasked with negotiating and drafting the new Constitution. Mohamed Morsi, now President, who was at that time head of the Freedom and Justice Party, said that the FJP would not appeal the court's decision. ¹⁹

Christian student sentenced to three years in jail for insulting Islam

Seventeen-year-old Gamal Abdou Massoud was sentenced to three years in prison for allegedly posting cartoons on his Facebook page which mocked Islam and the Prophet Mohammed, Reuters Africa reported on April 4. He was also accused of sharing the cartoons with school friends in his home town of Assiut, in Southern Egypt, a town with a large Christian population. The cartoons sparked sectarian violence in which several Christian homes were burnt down, and some Christians were injured. According to Negad al-Borai, the sentence is the maximum possible for such a crime. ²⁰

Egyptian women face rollback on rights

'The Media Line' reported on 15 April of plans by Mohamed El-Omda, an independent lawmaker, and the deputy head of the Egyptian Parliament's Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee to introduce legislation restricting the rights of Egyptian women. The legislation would revoke a woman's right to divorce, which El-Omda is portraying as a corrupt law from the Mubarak-era. Women were given *khula* in 2000, the right to order a divorce should the husband refuse to grant one. El-Omda, who sees this as "not Islamic for women", claims that the new law would be "part of Islam, which protects women and gives them rights". The Egyptian Women's Union (EWU) has called for a complete rejection of the proposed legislation. ²¹

Judge drops all charges against Salafi attackers who cut off Copt's ear

A judge in Upper Egypt has dropped all charges against a group of Salafis who cut off the ear of a Coptic man, and tried to force him to convert. The attack, which occurred on 20 March 2011, came after the group falsely accused Ayman Anwar Metry, 46, of running a brothel and having an affair with a Muslim woman. His attackers tried to force him to say the *shahada*, and cut off his ear when he

¹⁶ <http://www.aina.org/news/20120306013944.htm> <http://www.aina.org/news/20110908193725.htm>
<http://www.aina.org/news/20110930204413.htm>

¹⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-17832703>

¹⁸ <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJ0E83100520120402>

¹⁹ <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gN0mkasuGWOtD9d2BZS8OABisc7O?docId=CNG.d2bb9a7e8bf688e17518dc342eb755a6.371>

²⁰ <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJ0E83309420120404>

²¹ <http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=266095>

refused. They also started to saw open the back of his neck when he denied any romantic involvement with the woman, who was also beaten. Metry was forced to drop the case after the assailants shot at him, tried to burn down his house, and threatened to kidnap his sisters.²²

Panel drops Maspero case due to 'lack of evidence'

On 24 April, AINA reported that the panel appointed by the Egyptian Minister of Justice to investigate the Maspero Massacre had closed the case. The judge claimed the reason was "lack of identification of the culprits" of the events of 9 October 2011, which killed 27 people and left over 300 injured. Charges against Copts and Muslims alike were dropped because of lack of evidence. Friends and relatives of Maspero victims have vowed to continue fighting until they get justice, even considering going to international courts to do so. Lawyers representing the victims quit the court on 12 April, accusing the court of bias.²³

May 2012

Policeman sentenced to death for killing Christians

On 15 May, an Egyptian man was sentenced to death for the killing and wounding of six Copts in December 2010, according to AINA reports. The case had been passed to the Egyptian Grand Mufti, who upheld the ruling. According to eye-witnesses, Amer Ashour Abdel Zaher entered a train and opened fire on six Copts who were sitting together.

While the verdict came as a surprise to many in the Coptic community, others were less convinced of its legitimacy. Mina Yacoub, a Coptic activist, dismissed the ruling as being linked to the presidential elections, with Islamist parties seeking to appease the Coptic population and allay fears of the application of Sharia law.²⁴

Discriminatory Court ruling

On 21 May, in a ruling widely condemned by human rights defenders and activists, an Egyptian court sentenced twelve Copts to life imprisonment, while acquitting eight Muslims. The trial was related to sectarian violence which took place in Minya in April 2011. The Coptic Christians were accused of sowing public strife, possession of illegal weapons, and killing two Muslims. The tensions started when a Muslim driver confronted security guards at the house of a wealthy Christian, because of the speedbump outside the house. The driver assembled a group to avenge the alleged wrongdoing, but when they returned and surrounded the house, the guard opened fire from the building's roofs, killing two in the crowd and wounding two others. The eight Muslims on trial were accused of illegal possession of weapons and having burned Christian buildings in retaliation, but were acquitted of all charges.²⁵

Controversial statement attributed to Morsi

According to an unconfirmed report from popular news website, al-Bashayer, on May 27, Mohamed Morsi declared his intention to achieve the second Islamic conquest of Europe, making all Christians convert to Islam, pay *jizya*, a tax for non-Muslims, or leave the country. In response a question of who the second Islamic conqueror would be, the presidential candidate replied "Mohamed Morsi", referring to himself. The comments, as yet unconfirmed, were made in the context of a private

²² http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/egypt/article_1532636.html
<http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=press&id=1153>

²³ <http://www.aina.org/news/20120427193443.htm>

²⁴ <http://www.aina.org/news/20120515143707.htm> <http://www.aina.org/news/20110112115752.htm>

²⁵ <http://www.neurope.eu/article/egypt-sentences-12-coptic-christians-life-prison> <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Islamo-Christian-violence-in-Minya:-life-imprisonment-for-12-Copts.-eight-Muslims-acquitted-24821.html>
<http://www.aina.org/news/20120524134813.htm>

meeting at the headquarters of the Muslim Brotherhood. They stand in stark contrast to rhetoric seeking to woo Coptic voters.²⁶

June 2012

Violence erupts after accusations of proselytising

Twelve people were injured after clashes between Coptic and Muslim students in the women's dormitories of Assiut University on 9 June. A Coptic law student had been distributing leaflets and tracts in her dormitory, along with an Engineering student friend. Muslim students reported the Coptic students' actions, but when the building supervisor tried to intervene, she allegedly was beaten by students from both sides, who had started fighting.²⁷

July 2012

Coptic schoolteacher sentenced to six years for 'offending Islam' on Facebook

Bishoy Kameel Kamel el-Behery, a 32-year-old Coptic schoolteacher, was arrested on 30 July for posting cartoons on a Facebook page which allegedly defamed the Prophet and offended Islam. While admitting ownership of the page, Kamel claims that he was not responsible for the post, as the account had been hacked.²⁸ On 18 September, it was reported that Kamel had been sentenced to six years in prison for posting the cartoons, and for insulting President Mohamed Morsi and his family. The sentence breakdown was three years for defaming Islam and the Prophet Mohammed, two years for insulting the president, and one year for insulting Mohamed Safwat Tammam, who made the allegations against him. Members of Al-Jamaa Al-Islamiya and various Salafist groups attempted to attack Kamel when he was led out of the court after receiving his sentence. They then threw rocks at the police car used to transport him away from the court.²⁹

August 2012

Over 100 families leave homes in fear of violent backlash

One hundred and twenty Coptic families fled their homes on 1 August after a Muslim man died having suffered 3rd degree burns in an incident involving fighting between a large group of Muslims and a Coptic family. The tensions began on 27 July, when Sameh Samy, a Coptic professional garments presser, accidentally burnt the shirt of a Muslim client, Ahmad Ramadan. The two agreed to meet at Sameh's home once the Muslim had broken his fast, but when several hundred Muslims congregated, he locked himself inside. The mob fired shots and launched Molotov cocktails, one of which failed to explode, and was thrown back at the attackers, hitting Moadh Hassaballah. The group continued to torch Sameh's home and launderette after looting the contents, wounding Sameh and his family, and was prevented from storming a church by a group of moderate Muslims from the same village. The families returned to Dahshur one week later, and were given compensation for the losses they had incurred. However, several shops and homes were torched and looted, with one Coptic activist claiming that the security guards present did nothing to prevent the attacks.³⁰

²⁶ <http://www.elbashayer.com/news-194250.html>

²⁷ <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/sectarian-clashes-assiut-university-over-proselytizing-12-injured>

²⁸ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/49126/Egypt/Politics-/Egyptian-teacher-arrested-for-offending-Islam-on-F.aspx>

²⁹ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/53201/Egypt/0/Egyptian-Copt-jailed-for-insulting-Islam.-Morsi-on.aspx>
<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/egyptian-court-sends-copt-prison-over-anti-islam-post>
<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/1121521>

³⁰ <http://www.aina.org/news/20120731192433.htm> <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/evicted-coptic-christians-return-dahshur> <http://www.aina.org/news/20120802201306.htm>

Shia man sentenced for 'desecration of a place of worship'

On August 15, Al-Masry Al-Youm reported that Mohamed Asfour, a Shia Muslim, was sentenced to a year in prison for desecration of a place of worship. The ruling, reduced from the planned sentence of three years with hard labour and a fine of 100,000 Egyptian pounds, came after Asfour allegedly prayed with a stone between his head and the ground, a practice accepted by Shia Muslims but not by Sunnis.³¹

Copts attacked after Islamists publish inflammatory leaflets

According to an unconfirmed report published in Al Akhbar News, Copts in Sohag, Upper Egypt were attacked after Islamist groups distributed leaflets calling for the killing or physical attack of 'enemies of the religion of Allah'. Four Coptic stores were set on fire, hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of merchandise was looted, and houses were robbed and attacked, with ownership contracts also being stolen. In addition, physical attacks were carried out on Copts, using sticks and canes, and accompanied by threats of further violence.³²

September 2012

Poet summoned over contempt of religion

On 10 September, poet Hisham al-Gokh was summoned by the new Cairo Prosecutor after a lawyer filed a complaint against his work, accusing him of contempt of religion. Salwa al-Faresy provided the relevant part of the poem in her complaint, which accused al-Gokh of using religious imagery and comparisons, as well as distorting verses from the Quran, likening his beloved to Ka'abah, and referring to the five pillars of Islam.³³

Atheist activist blogger arrested

On 13 September, Alber Saber, an activist and blogger (27), was arrested following allegations that he had posted the film, *Innocence of Muslims*, on his Facebook page. A mob gathered outside his house, threatening to burn it down. When his mother called the authorities for assistance, instead of dispersing the mob, they arrested him. Saber denied all charges, and started a hunger strike in jail. His trial resumed on October 17, with his lawyers calling for forensic evidence of several attacks against his person to be provided. According to Egypt Independent, one such attack occurred after a police officer told other detainees that Saber had ripped up a copy of the Quran. Charges relating to Saber posting the film on his Facebook page were later dropped due to lack of evidence, and he was eventually charged on the basis of an atheist video he had made. He has faced threats and physical abuse while incarcerated, including having his throat cut with a razor blade. In addition, cell conditions in the prison are squalid, and prison authorities often deny the right of family members to visit him.³⁴

On 12 December, the court sentenced Saber to three years' imprisonment for blasphemy and contempt of religion. Although his lawyers posted bail for his release, Saber was still sent to prison. Saber left the country on 26 January after appealing against the sentence and being released.³⁵

³¹ <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/egypt-s-shia-pay-price-regional-struggle>
<http://dailynewsegypt.com/2012/08/01/clinton-since-mubarak-sectarian-violence-has-increased/>

³² <http://www.inquisitr.com/307894/christians-being-killed-by-islamists-in-egypt-and-nigeria-2/>
<http://www.alkhabrnews.com/view/?q=5051>

³³ <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/poet-summoned-interrogation-over-contempt-religion>
<http://dailynewsegypt.com/2012/10/10/contempt-of-religion-case/> (Originally an Arabic-language ONA report)

³⁴ http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/egyptian-blogger-alber-sabers-arrest-shows-differences-over-freedom-of-speech/2012/09/26/b5cfb272-07dd-11e2-aff-d6c7f20a83bf_story.html

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/52974/Egypt/0/Egyptian-activist-detained-for-posting-antislam-f.aspx>
<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/court-rule-blogger-s-contempt-religion-case>

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/trial-atheist-alber-saber-resumes>
<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/rights-groups-condemn-detention-atheist-blasphemy-charges>

³⁵ <http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=press&id=1463>

Families leave homes after Islamists threats

Nine Coptic families fled their homes in Rafah on 28 September, and 23 more families planned to follow them. This exodus came after a Coptic man received a warning that 'all Christians should leave Rafah within 48 hours, otherwise they will be killed.' Masked men on motorcycles sprayed Coptic shops with bullets two days earlier. The nine families who left have been given posts in the neighbouring town of Al-Arish, but for other families the move will prove much more difficult, as many are shop-owners and own property.³⁶

Maikel Nabil, Coptic activist, charged with insulting Islam

On September 30, Youm al-Saba'a reported that Maikel Nabil Sanad, the Egyptian Coptic activist, had been charged with contempt of religion, in addition to charges previously brought against him for 'insulting the military'. Nabil, in Germany at the time of the charge, made wide use of his blog and Twitter account to criticise the post-Mubarak regime. Egypt has called on the German government to return Nabil as soon as possible in order to face the charges, but as the charges could see him return to prison, it is unclear whether Germany will cooperate with Egypt's request. In a defiant article published on October 19, Nabil himself admits holding atheistic beliefs, and criticises the Egyptian government for laws which criminalise the expression of certain opinions.³⁷

October 2012

Teacher accused of blasphemy for teaching lesson about Mohammed

On 2 October, Nevine Gad al-Sayed, a social sciences teacher in Assiut Province, was accused of blasphemy for allegedly calling the Prophet Mohammed 'poor' during a preparatory school history lesson. A student, Mohamed Moustafa Ahmed Hashim, had filed a complaint against her, alleging that she said that Mohammed was raised in a poor family. The Assiut educational administration provided attendance lists showing that the student had been absent from school, and therefore could not have attended the lesson in question. Al-Sayed was released and the case was dismissed as a malicious complaint.³⁸

Boys arrested for 'contempt for religion'

On 3 October, two children were arrested for allegedly tearing up pages of the Quran, urinating on them, and placing them near a mosque in the Ezbet Marco area of southern Beni Suef. Ibrahim Mohamed, a Salafi Sheikh, turned Nabil Rizk (ten) and Mina al-Farag (nine) into Ishak Qastour, the priest at the local Angel Michael Church, but felt the priest's response was unsatisfactory, and took the case to court. Rizk's father responded by saying that as the boys are illiterate, they were unaware of the content of the pages.³⁹ The boys were released on 4 October, after expecting to have been charged with blasphemy. Gamal Eid, a human rights lawyer on the team representing the two boys, reported that the charges were dropped on 10 October. George Bibawi, the boys' lawyer, refuted all reports that President Morsi had a role in the helping the release of the two boys.⁴⁰

³⁶ <http://www.aina.org/news/20120928192826.htm> <http://dailynewsegypt.com/2012/09/29/egyptian-christians-threatened-in-rafah/> <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/rights-organizations-ruling-against-saber-sign-religious-dictatorship> <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/update-coptic-man-reopens-his-rafah-store-after-threats-four-coptic-families-flee-assiut-after-> <http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=press&id=1432>

³⁷ <http://www.bikyamasr.com/78746/egypt-coptic-christian-maikel-nabil-charged-with-insulting-islam-germany-requested-to-send-home/> http://transitions.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/10/19/yes_i_m_a_blasphemer_get_over_it

³⁸ <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/two-minors-beni-suef-accused-blasphemy> <http://dailynewsegypt.com/2012/10/03/children-latest-target-of-contempt-of-religion-charges/> <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/54832/Egypt/Politics-/Saga-of-Coptic-teacher-maliciously-accused-of-insu.aspx>

³⁹ <http://dailynewsegypt.com/2012/10/03/children-latest-target-of-contempt-of-religion-charges/> <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/two-minors-beni-suef-accused-blasphemy>

⁴⁰ <http://www.aina.org/news/20121010181100.htm> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/10/egypt-blasphemy-idAFL6E8LAB3B20121010> <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/54811/Egypt/Politics-/BREAKING-Two-Coptic-children-accused-of-insulting.aspx> <http://www.copts-united.com/Arabic2011/Article.php?l=1314&A=72302>

Four die as Gang Attempts to Kidnap Christian Mother ⁴¹

According to several reports, Ali Abu Hussein Ali, nicknamed 'Holako' for his record of brutality, entered the house of a Copt named Hiyam Zaki Maher ⁴² in Mallawi in Dayr Mawas on the morning of 14 October, demanding that she should come to live with him. Ali Hussein had threatened two weeks earlier that they would take her if the Marzouk family failed to pay them 1,000,000 Egyptian pounds (USD 165,000, GBP 105,000). The family had ensured that the 25-year old mother of two had left the village a day before the intrusion. According to a relative, Hussein Ali encountered Ephrem, another family member, on entering the house, and shot him twice, killing him instantly. Subsequently, the gang, consisting of Hussein Ali's two brothers and 120 other men, also entered the house, killing 61-year old Ibrahim Marzouk, the father of the family, and wounding another three family members. Ali Hussein was also killed, though it is unclear who shot him. The police arrived nine hours later, and were therefore accused by the Coptic community of conspiring with Ali Hussein and his gang. ⁴³

A number of local Salafis protested the killing of a Muslim at the hands of Christians, calling Ali Hussein 'beloved of the Prophet'. ^{44 45}

Muslim Egyptian Lawyer and Sons attempt to demolish church

According to an AINA report, on 8 October Mohammad Mostafa Kamel, a Prosecutor at the Alexandria Criminal Court, broke into a church with his two sons and several other hired Muslims and attempted to demolish it. Despite having no demolition order, they arrived with a front loader, and proceeded to demolish part of the altar at St Mary's Church in Rashid, near Alexandria. Fathers Maximos and Luke Asaad rushed to the police station to report the incident, and when Kamel and his sons were brought to the station, they threatened to kill the two priests and their lawyer. Although the police confiscated the front loader, they refused to take legal action against Kamel, because of his position as a Prosecutor. A police report was filed relating to the threats. ⁴⁶

Trial of Islamist cleric accused of burning a Bible postponed

The trial of an Islamist cleric accused of burning a Bible continues. Supporters of Abu Islam Ahmed Abdullah disrupted the trial, ripping and burning images of Jesus and the late Coptic Pope Shenouda III. Responding to accusations that he burnt a Bible during protests in September, Abu Islam claimed "there is no such thing as the Bible or the Torah", and asserted that he had set fire to an English-language Bible, and not the Coptic-approved Arabic translation, out of respect for the Coptic community. A decision on Abu Islam's request for the panel of judges to be changed was postponed until 16 December. ⁴⁷

Dr Naguib Gabriel, a prominent human rights lawyer, noted that all Coptic Christians charged with defaming Islam are brought to justice without delay. Ahram Online noted that in all other cases of defamation of religion involving Coptic defendants, the accused have been held in police custody until the conclusion of their trials. This case stands as a notable exception, illustrating a double standard relating to the treatment of religious minorities in the justice system.

Egyptian teacher sentenced for cutting hair of two unveiled girls

On 7 November, an Egyptian schoolteacher, Iman Abu Bakr Kilani, was given a suspended six month sentence for cutting the hair of two girls in her class who came to school without a hijab. Although it is not compulsory, and many girls start wearing it after puberty, Iman Kilani had ordered all her

⁴¹ <http://www.aina.org/news/20121017202832.htm>

⁴² Name also reported as Hayam Zaky Zahran

⁴³ <http://www.aina.org/news/20121017202832.htm>

⁴⁴ <http://dailynewsegypt.com/2012/10/15/sectarian-tensions-rise-in-wake-of-crime-boss-death/>

⁴⁵ Watani Weekly Newspaper article, Watani International, 14 October 2012, Nader Shukry & Tereza Hanna

⁴⁶ <http://www.aina.org/news/20121008001210.htm>

⁴⁷ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/57126.aspx> <http://www.aina.org/news/2012101594633.htm>

<http://www.aina.org/news/20121022194716.htm> <http://dailynewsegypt.com/2012/11/17/abu-islam-trial-postponed/>

female students to wear a hijab to school, and cut the hair of Mona Barbesh and another girl when they arrived bareheaded to a science class on 18 October.⁴⁸

Angry mob bars church goers in Beni Suef

A large mob gathered around the only Coptic Church in Ezbet Marco, Beni Suef on 28 October, preventing churchgoers from other villagers from attending. Daily News Egypt reported that skirmishes occurred, resulting in several individuals suffering fractures to their arms and feet. Copts without churches in their village are forced to attend churches in neighbouring towns, and while mosques may be built freely with little government interference, Copts require written permission, and requests are often rejected.⁴⁹

Salafis disrupt unity concert

A crowd of Salafi Muslims surrounded a concert venue on 29 October, protesting a celebration of Egyptian national unity which they perceived as promoting Christianity. The Construction and Development Party, the political wing of Gama'a Islamia, surrounded the concert venue in Minya shortly after it began. Security personnel advised those attending the concert to leave so as to avoid further clashes. The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) denounced the assault.⁵⁰

November 2012

Abduction of Coptic girl aged fourteen

According to reports, fourteen year old Sarah Ishaq Abdelmalek was abducted on 30 September while on her way to school with her cousin Miriam. She has not been seen since. Shortly after filing a missing person report, her father received a call informing him that he would never see his daughter again. On 28 October the Salafist Front issued a statement warning human rights organisations not to attempt returning Sarah to her family, and claiming that she had converted to Islam and married a Muslim man. The Salafist Front also denied the truth of claims by Sarah's family that she is a minor, despite the Coptic Association of Victims of Abduction and Enforced Disappearance (AVAED) publishing a copy of her birth certificate, which states her date of birth as 1 August 1998. Mohammed Abdul Salam, the Attorney General for West Alexandria, ordered the arrest of a bookseller in Marsa Matrouh in relation to the kidnapping, and the acting pope, Bishop Pachomious called for Sarah, who is a member of his congregation, to be returned to her family without delay.⁵¹

Church land briefly occupied by Salafis

According to local news reports on 6 November, a group of Salafis briefly took over the land of a church in the Shubra al-Kheima District of Cairo. A sign reading 'Al-Rahma Mosque' was erected, and the group performed Islamic prayers inside the building for 24 hours, leaving only when church authorities informed the Interior Ministry. Security has since removed the sign. Bishop Morcos, Coptic Bishop of the district, was able to prevent Copts from reacting, but confessed that he would not be able to do so forever. The Maspero Copts Youth Union denounced the occupation, while the Egyptian Coptic Coalition Group held Mohamed Morsi responsible, calling for harsher punishment for such attacks and strict laws against "extremist" preachers. In addition, they suggested the appointment of an independent and impartial security official in each governorate, to respond immediately to attacks on citizens or property on the basis of their religion.⁵²

⁴⁸ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-20228328> <http://www.aina.org/news/20121017193620.htm>

⁴⁹ <http://dailynewsegypt.com/2012/10/28/angry-mob-bars-church-goers-in-beni-suef/>
<http://www.aina.org/news/20121029195111.htm>

⁵⁰ <http://dailynewsegypt.com/2012/10/29/salafis-disrupt-unity-concert/>

⁵¹ <http://www.aina.org/news/20121101201755.htm> <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/west-alexandria-ag-orders-arrest-suspect-coptic-girl-s-kidnapping>

⁵² <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/57330/Egypt/Politics-/Coptic-coalition-demands-action-following-Salafist.aspx>
<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/57283/Egypt/Politics-/Church-land-in-Shubra-briefly-occupied-by-Salafist.aspx>

Muslim woman cuts hair of Coptic girl on Cairo subway

On 7 November, a veiled Muslim woman cut the hair of a Coptic schoolgirl while on the subway. The unveiled schoolgirl, Maggie Milad Fazez, (aged thirteen), entered the train car, on the way to Zaytoun Preparatory school. She pushed past the woman, who threatened her, saying “you don’t know what I will do to you”. On leaving the train, Maggie found that her hair had been cut, and was lying on her collar. A police complaint was filed in Zaytoun, a suburb of Cairo. According to Maggie’s father, she was suffering psychologically and had abstained from taking food. ⁵³

Dr Naguib Gabriel, of the Egyptian Union of Human Rights, noted that a girl in first grade at Saray el Koba High School had her hair cut off in similar fashion just a few days earlier

Christian woman assaulted on metro

On 11 November, according to a statement published by the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights, a 28 year-old Christian was assaulted by two women wearing the niqab. The women cut her hair and called her an ‘infidel’, before pushing her off the train, resulting in a broken arm. ⁵⁴

Reform campaigner accused of insulting Sharia and offending Islamists

A complaint was filed against renowned politician Mohamed ElBaradei, after he allegedly insulted Islamist preachers and stood against Sharia law. According to Ahram Arabic news website, a complaint was brought by 40 Islamist lawyers on 11 November, claiming that ElBaradei had described some religious preachers and leaders as ‘clowns’ and ‘merchants of religion’ during a press conference in Aswan. Yosry Hamad, leader of the Salafi Nour Party, also claimed that ElBaradei had used certain terms deemed offensive. ⁵⁵

December 2012

Fear campaign keeps Copts away from Constitution referendum

Widespread reports suggest that Islamists conducted a fear campaign in order to intimidate Coptic communities and keep them from voting on the new Constitution. One week before the 15 December vote, 50,000 Islamists marched through Assiut, in Southern Egypt, chanting “Islamic, Islamic, despite the Christians”, led by several men on horseback, replete with swords in scabbards. They intentionally targeted predominantly Coptic areas of Assiut.

Voter turnout was therefore as low as seven percent in some areas, with several would-be voters pelted with stones and forced to turn back before casting their ballots. Assem Abdel-Magued, a senior member of Gama’a Islamiya, allied to Mohamed Morsi’s government, dismissed the claims as “lies and rumours”. ⁵⁶

Sectarian pronouncements by Brotherhood spokespersons

The Coptic community was accused of making up the majority of those protesting against the President Morsi’s arbitrary seizure of power and the new constitution, with spokespersons claiming that they accounted for the majority of the protesters. In an interview on the Muslim Brotherhood television channel, the presenter stated that many of those committing violence were Christian and that weapons had come from Christian areas.⁵⁷ In a publication on Ikhwan Online, the Brotherhood’s website, Copts were accused of sending sms’s to voters in the Sohag area telling them to vote against the constitution in order to prevent the creation of an Islamic state.⁵⁸ This characterisation of the

<http://www.bikyamasr.com/80348/egypt-salafists-briefly-take-hold-of-coptic-christian-land/>

⁵³ <http://www.aina.org/news/20121106194112.htm> <http://www.egyptindependent.com/node/1227146>

⁵⁴ <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/women-assault-cut-hair-christian-woman-metro>

⁵⁵ <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/57824.aspx>

⁵⁶ <http://news.yahoo.com/fear-keeps-egypts-christians-away-polls-220304892.html> (AP)

⁵⁷ <http://storify.com/SaraLabib/an-example-of-muslim-brotherhood-sectarian-rhetoric>

⁵⁸ <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/new/Article.aspx?ArtID=131916&SecID=230>

protests as an anti-Islamic and Coptic-inspired plot to bring down the government of President Morsi is not only an indication of the Muslim Brotherhood's failure to recognise the Coptic community's fears with regard to the new Constitution⁵⁹, it also points to a worrying tendency to deflect criticism and inflame the majority religious population by using the sectarian card.

⁵⁹ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/12/coptic-christians-worried-by-brotherhood-statements.html>
(translated from <http://today.almasryalyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=364566&IssueID=2721>)