



# **Freedom of Religion and Belief in Egypt**

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## Report Summary

This report examines the most significant developments in Egypt for freedom of religion and belief during the months of October, November and December 2009.

The report documents several cases of sectarian violence and tension between Muslims and Christians in a number of governorates in the period under review. It provides a detailed review of two incidents that involved collective attacks on the homes and property of Copts in Dayrut, located in the Assyout governorate, in October 2009 and in the districts of Farshout and Abu Tisht, located in the Qena governorate, in November. The report also discusses two attacks on churches, one in the district of Tama, Sohag governorate, and the other in the district of Sanouras, Fayyoun governorate.

This report documents the continuation of sectarian attacks or security interventions and abuses in cases where Christians engage in religious rites in private buildings or are suspected of seeking to turn existing buildings or those under construction into churches. These cases included the demolition of a building owned by a Christian association in Cairo's al-Abagiya neighborhood; the arrest of a citizen on charges of holding Christian worship services in his home in Deir Salamout in Minya; the posting of a guard detail on a private building in the village of Danasour in Menoufiya; and several problems related to the issuance of government licenses for the construction of new churches or the renovation of existing churches in the district of Abu Tisht in Qena and the Maghagha and al-Adwa districts in Minya.

Regarding court rulings, the report discusses the ongoing legal problems associated with conversion from Islam to Christianity. In the period under review, in two separate criminal cases, two women were sentenced to prison on charges of falsifying personal documents to show that they had converted to Christianity. The report reviews several other court rulings issued in the same period, including a ruling rejecting the registration of the Jehovah's Witnesses and another rejecting an appeal against the prison sentence of blogger Karim Amer, who was convicted of showing contempt for Islam and insulting the President. Another court order rejected a lawsuit asking that Easter be made an official state holiday.

As usual, the report documents the most significant administrative rulings, political developments, civil society activities and Egyptian and foreign reports connected to religion in Egypt.

## FRB Quarterly Reports

The aim of the Freedom of Religion and Belief Quarterly Reports is to provide legislators, policymakers, researchers, the media and other stakeholders with a primary source for documented information on the most significant political, legal and social developments affecting freedom of religion and belief in Egypt. This report does not offer an analysis of the facts, but only documents them as a basis for further analysis.

In preparing this report the Freedom of Religion and Belief Program of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) relies on field research by program staff, complaints received by the EIPR during the reporting period, information gleaned from news reports and confirmed by researchers, and laws and governmental decrees related to freedom of religion and belief as published in the *Official Gazette*. This report is not a comprehensive overview of all pertinent developments, but is limited to the facts the report's authors view as most significant and were able to confirm.

## Acknowledgements

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## I. Court Rulings and Trials

1. On 14 October 2009, in case no. 444/2009/criminal/al-Wayli, a Cairo criminal court headed by Judge Adli Mahmoud Hassan sentenced citizen A.R.S. to one year in prison after she was convicted of placing false information on her application for a national identity card. A.R.S. was accused of using the name and identifying information of a deceased Christian women and subsequently using this application with the falsified information to obtain a national identity card. The court also sentenced B.S.R., the sister of the deceased, to five years in prison in absentia for signing the application form and attesting to the veracity of the information contained therein.

The ruling, a copy of which was obtained by the EIPR, stated, "The court was unequivocally convinced that the two defendants, who are not civil servants, falsified an official document, the application for a national identity card issued by the Civil Status Authority. This was done with the participation of two well-intentioned civil servants with the Authority. [The defendants] knowingly falsified information, with the first defendant assuming the name of [the deceased], using her personal information and falsely attesting that it was true on the aforementioned application. The second defendant falsely attested that it was true, after which the employee at the Authority approved it, and thus the crime was committed pursuant to this help."

In a story about the ruling published in the daily *al-Shorouk* on 18 October 2009, the paper stated, "The defendant converted to Christianity ten years ago and disappeared from her family's home in Mansoura. Her mother filed a missing persons report, but the police were unable to discover the cause of her disappearance all these years until the Civil Status Authority exposed the falsification of her identity card. The police attempted to arrest her, but could not find her. When the defendant went to the Cairo airport in an attempt to flee to South Africa, security arrested her and informed her that she was charged in a forgery case and wanted for prosecution."

2. On 21 October 2009, a Cairo criminal court headed by Judge Intisar Nasim sentenced citizen A.S.M., a convert from Islam to Christianity, to one year in prison with labor after she was convicted of abetting the falsification of her marriage contract with a Christian by taking a false Christian name on the contract. The court also convicted her of complicity in the falsification of her son's birth certificate and family identity card through the use of the falsified marriage contract. After the verdict was issued, the defendant told the daily *al-Shorouk* in its 22 October issue that "she had converted to Christianity and was filing a lawsuit with the Court of Administrative Justice to compel the Minister of Interior to change her name to Marola to establish the legitimacy of her marriage and her child's identity."

3. On 13 December 2009 the sixth circuit of the Court of Administrative Justice, headed by Judge Anwar Ibrahim Khalil, voided a decree issued by the president of Ain Shams University prohibiting female students who wear a full face veil (*niqab*) from living in student dormitories. The decision came in response to two cases (2008/64 and 2009/64) filed by two students who wear the *niqab* against the rules issued by the university president. The court ordered the university to give the two plaintiffs housing in the Ain Shams University dorms for the 2009-10 academic year.

In its ruling, a copy of which was obtained by the EIPR, the court stated, "It is well-established in the proceedings of courts under the State Council that the legislator has set up a bulwark around personal freedom and public rights and liberties. Since donning the *niqab* is, for a Muslim woman, a manifestation of this freedom, no administrative or other body can place an absolute ban on it. When necessary for the public interest, the woman's identity can be verified based on the exigencies of public security, to receive knowledge or various services, to carry out certain services or based on other considerations of contemporary daily life that require the woman's identity to be confirmed when asked by the competent authorities." The ruling referred to a previous ruling handed down by the Supreme Administrative Court's Circuit for the Unification of Principles in appeal no. 3219/48, issued on 9 June 2007, which allowed students wearing the *niqab* to enter university grounds.

The court stated, "The protection guaranteed by the Constitution for the right to education extends to all its constituent elements. It is impermissible to discriminate between students in treatment, and the right to education includes the rights to benefit from [educational] facilities and services."

Last year, the Supreme Council of Universities, chaired by Dr. Hani Helal, the Minister of Higher Education and the Minister of State for Scientific Research, prohibited the wearing of the *niqab* in university dormitories, according to press statements made by Helal. The decree went into effect with the beginning of the current school year. Helal justified the decision in statements made to *al-Ahram* on 12 October 2009 saying, "Individual freedom is not absolute; it should not encroach on others. Universities believe that it is their duty to protect the security of all female students in the dormitories...Students must comply with rules in the dorms as established by the university for their benefit." Hilal said the decree "is irreversible, out of protection for female students in the dormitories in particular. It's only girls there, so what need is there to wear a *niqab* in the dorms? Supervisors must be able to recognize the students before they enter the female dorms—15 men have been caught trying to enter the dormitories under cover of the *niqab*."

When the decree went into effect this year, students who wear the *niqab* organized demonstrations at several Egyptian universities demanding that it be rescinded.

4. The Supreme State Security Court on 16 December 2009 overturned a detention order issued by the Minister of Interior for blogger Hani Nazir, who writes the Karez al-Hubb blog. The Interior Ministry arrested Nazir on 3 October 2008 following rumors in the village of al-Ila, located in the Abu Tisht district of Qena, that he had published materials defaming Islam on his blog (see paragraph 20 of the

Fourth Quarterly Report, 2008). Although the Ministry of Interior appealed the ruling, the court rejected the appeal on 10 January 2010, upholding the lower court ruling and overturning the order for administrative detention.

5. On 19 December 2009, a Cairo criminal court headed by Judge Saad Badawi Hammad sentenced Rami Khilla and his uncle Atef Khilla, both Christians, to death by hanging. Rami Khilla was convicted of the murder of his brother-in-law after his sister converted to Islam and married a Muslim, as well as the attempted murder of his sister and niece, with the help of his uncle.

On 6 October 2008, Rami Khilla used an automatic weapon to shoot his sister and her family; his sister had converted to Islam two years earlier, married a Muslim and had a 10-month-old daughter. Her Muslim husband died, while the child was injured; the woman was injured in her left arm, which was amputated as a result. The defendant fled the scene with his uncle, the second defendant in the case, who was waiting in a car nearby (see paragraph 9 of the Fourth Quarterly Report, 2008). The written ruling had not yet been issued at the time of writing.

6. On 22 December 2009, the Cairo Criminal Court for Misdemeanor Appeals, headed by Judge Amin Safwat, rejected an appeal (no. 321/2007) filed by lawyers with the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information on behalf of blogger Abd al-Karim Nabil Suleiman, known as Karim Amer, contesting the four-year prison sentence handed down to Amer by the Muharram Bek Misdemeanor Appeals Court in Alexandria after he was convicted of denigrating and mocking Islam and insulting the President. Amer's ruling is thus final.

The security apparatus arrested the blogger in late October 2006 because of opinions he published on his blog. After he was released by security, al-Azhar University, where he was enrolled as a student, expelled him and filed a complaint against him with the Public Prosecutor. Amer was questioned by the Supreme State Security Prosecutor and referred to the Muharram Bek Misdemeanor Court in Alexandria, which sentenced him to four years in prison. The sentence was previously upheld by the Appeals Court (see paragraph 6 of the Third Quarterly Report, 2009).

7. On 26 December 2009, the seventh circuit of the Court of Administrative Justice headed by Judge Hamdi Yassin Okasha rejected a lawsuit (no. 13033/54) filed by a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, a Christian denomination that is not recognized by the Egyptian state. The lawsuit asked for the abolition of a decree issued by the Notary Bureau that prohibits any notary office or branch office from taking any measures to notarize, sign or validate documents issued by the Jehovah's Witnesses Association.

Seeking to establish an association, the Christian Jehovah's Witnesses Cultural Association for Social Development, the plaintiff and others went to a notary office to have a rental contract notarized for an apartment to be used by the association (still under establishment), but the office refused, based on Notice no. 9/1985, issued on 21 August 1985. That notice bans notaries from "taking any measure to notarize a marriage contract in which one or both spouses declare their Christian religion to be



Jehovah's Witnesses. No measure may be taken to notarize signatures or dates on any documents issued by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Association, which is the Jehovah's Witnesses Association," according to the court ruling, a copy of which was obtained by the EIPR.

In its ruling, the court addressed the legitimacy of the Jehovah's Witnesses Association within the Egyptian legal system: "The Jehovah's Witnesses Association — though its members may consider themselves to be Christian — does not represent a Christian confession denomination that has acquired legal personhood in the Egyptian legal system as an Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant sect...Insofar as freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites are concerned, it is free to believe what it likes about its relationship to its lord, but as a group it does not belong to the Egyptian legal system. As such, individuals seeking to establish the association and notarize documents of their affairs have that right as individuals, exclusive of the right to form religious associations that do not belong to the Egyptian legal system."

The court added, "Although the right to form associations is a constitutional right that must be protected, it is conditional: the goal of establishing an association cannot violate the rules of the public order that achieve the country's public interest, for these are connected to the natural moral or material condition of an organized society and supersede individual interests. They are founded on the idea of protecting society from sectarian strife and maintaining the elements of national unity, particularly when both freedom of belief and the right to form associations are so closely connected to the established collective legal and social order, such that public sentiment is harmed when any belief or association threatens the public order."

The court discussed the beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses through others' perceptions of those beliefs. Thus, the court based its judgment on the view of "Pope Shenouda, the patriarch of the Holy See of St. Mark of Orthodox Copts," saying that Shenouda described the group as "not one heresy established a quarter century ago, but rather a set of heresies and perversions of the Book. They are generally against religion and they are not Christians despite their belief in the four Gospels...They are not affiliated with Christ but with Jehovah, one of the names of God in the Old Testament." The court reasoned that the beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses were incompatible with public order, saying, "Many of the beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses clash with the public order, including their denial of all religions and their belief that these are all the work of Satan and were established by Nimrod..." Digressing into a critique of the group's beliefs, the court said that they hold "a threat of religious and sectarian strife and the destruction of the foundation of national unity on which the fabric of Egyptian society is based."

The court concluded that "while the Jehovah's Witnesses and others have the freedom of belief and religious practice in the relationship between its adherents and God in accordance with the Constitution, its legal presence and its right as a group to enjoy rights and liberties is conditional on it being an inseparable part of the Egyptian legal system as noted. It is not so, which means its lawsuit has no legal basis and must be rejected."

8. The Court of Administrative Justice on 29 December 2009 rejected two lawsuits filed by Christian citizens requesting that the Prime Minister declare Easter as a national holiday and an official day off for all state and public sector agencies.

In its ruling, a copy of which was obtained by the EIPR, the court stated that there is no "legal obligation on the government to consider Easter an official holiday for state ministries and departments."

The plaintiffs argued that not making Easter an official state holiday constitutes religious discrimination, since the state observes many Islamic holidays, to which the court responded, "The government does not glorify the religious holidays of Muslims to the exclusion of other confessions, and it does not discriminate between religious holidays in regard to their holiness and the respect accorded them. It does not object to the right of citizens of different religions to observe the rites of their religious holidays, releasing them from the restrictions of work."

Explaining the fact that some Islamic holidays are state holidays while Easter is not, the court stated, "The crux of the matter is that [the government], when deciding on the appropriateness of suspending work in ministries and state agencies on Muslim religious holidays, comes down on the side of reality since the majority of employees, as well as the majority of the population, are Muslims. In practice it would be difficult to require employees to work in their departments and offices. Thus, there is no government bias in favor of Muslims at the expense of other religious confessions...At the same time, there are facilities and departments that do not halt their work due to people's urgent need for them, such as transportation facilities, prosecutors' offices, and electricity and water facilities. It need not be said that most of the staff and workers at these facilities are Muslims, and mandating that they work on their religious holidays is not incompatible with the sanctity of the holidays."

Addressing the status of non-Muslims, the court stated, "As for non-Muslims, they are a minority of civil servants and their absence on their holidays does not affect the organized flow of work; similarly, their leaving government offices to celebrate their holidays does not paralyze work. Thus, saying that the contested decree was issued due to some religious bias or intent to maintain discrimination and inequality is far from the truth. There can be no argument that many Muslim religious holidays and occasions are not holidays in ministries and state agencies. As for the official celebration of some of these holidays, this is attributable to historical, social and pragmatic considerations."

The court cited other nations as examples, saying that they follow the same method and describing them as "the highest constitutional nations." The court added, "Western countries officially celebrate Christian religious holidays and do not celebrate non-Christian holidays, although some of their citizens belong to non-Christian confessions. No one has said that this is religious bigotry that undermines equality and freedom of belief or impinges on the civilizational status of these

countries. Moreover, non-Muslims celebrate their religious holidays just as Muslims celebrate theirs. They have the freedom to practice their rites in houses of worship, churches and temples on these holidays, and civil servants are released of their duties in government ministries and agencies. There is no coercion prohibiting them from practicing their rites. In this, they are exactly like Muslims. As such, equality and freedom of belief are guaranteed for them and are not encroached upon.”

## II. Sectarian Tension and Violence

9. On 10 October 2009 an unknown person broke two crosses at the top of the Martyr Abu Fam al-Gindi Church in the district of Tama in Sohag. According to a priest with the church, the person climbed the stairs of the church’s bell tower to reach the two plaster crosses at the top, vandalizing them while uttering religious expressions; he escaped before he could be identified or arrested.

Father Hadra Lodim, the church priest, told EIPR researchers that priests informed State Security police about the incident, after which both the director of Sohag security and the chief of criminal investigations came to the church and wrote out a police report. The Public Prosecutor’s Office also started an investigation into the matter. The prosecutor ordered the speedy apprehension of the perpetrator, but he had not been arrested at the time this report was written. Father Hadra stressed the good Muslim-Christian relations in the area, which has not seen any sectarian tension in the past.

10. On 22 October 2009, the Qena security apparatus convened a reconciliation meeting to end a vendetta between the Muslim Hadadil family and the Coptic al-Suleiman family in the village of Higaza Qibli, located in the Qus district of Qena, in an attempt to prevent the vendetta from leading to sectarian clashes. The meeting was attended by General Magdi Ayoub, the governor of Qena; General Mahmoud Gawhar, the director of Qena security; and General Mohamed Badr, the director of the governorate’s criminal police division, as well as several MPs from Qena and many executive and popular leaders. All in all more than 5,000 people were in attendance.

In 2004, the village was the scene of a fight between the two families that left Mohamed Said, a member of the Hadadil family, dead. Three members of the al-Suleiman family were given three-year prison terms following the incident on conviction of charges of manslaughter. The security apparatus then forced approximately 22 Christian families to leave their homes and the village.

In April 2009, five members of the Hadadil family killed two Copts on the eve of Easter, Hadra Adib Said, 26, a member of the al-Suleiman family, and his friend Amir Estefanos Khalil, 27. Mina Samir Gadallah, 25, was injured (see paragraph 11 of the Second Quarterly Report, 2009). The perpetrators were arrested and

questioned by the Public Prosecutor's Office, which referred them to the Luxor Criminal Court on charges of premeditated murder. The trial has been completed and the verdict is to be announced on 22 February 2010.

Several members of both families shook hands at the reconciliation meeting, after which both families erected mourning tents for three days; neither family had done so in the wake of the death of their kin, out of desire to seek vengeance first.

The family of Amir Estefanos Khalil did not take part in the reconciliation meeting in October. Estefanos Khalil, Amir's father, told EIPR researchers that his son had been "a victim of the vendetta" even though he was not a member of the al-Suleiman family. He said that MPs and Father Beiman, the bishop of Qus, had asked him to attend, but he said that there was no need because he intended to harm no one. He also criticized the way the security apparatus had dealt with the disappearance of his daughter Amal Estafanos, born on 17 October 1990; Amal disappeared on 12 September 2009. Security informed the girl's mother that she had converted to Islam. Khalil said that security denied his request to meet with his daughter, to confirm that her conversion was voluntary. He added that when he obtained a copy of his daughter's birth certificate on 25 October, she was still registered as a Christian, which means that she had not converted to Islam as of that date.

11. On 24 October 2009, the city of Dayrut in Assyout witnessed extensive sectarian attacks that targeted three churches, the Coptic bishopric and Christian-owned properties, including pharmacies, shops, cars and homes. The attacks took place after a court order was issued renewing the remand of four Muslims accused of murdering Copt Farouq Henry, 61. Henry was killed on 20 October after video footage circulated in the city allegedly showing Henry's son having sex with a Muslim girl related to the four defendants. The girl's relatives attacked the father of the Christian boy, shooting him in front of a primary school in the Dayrut district. He was killed on the spot while two Muslims present on the scene were injured. Security arrested the four suspects within 24 hours and referred them to the prosecutor's office, which charged them with premeditated murder and ordered them remanded for four days pending an investigation into case no. 5632/2009/administrative/Dayrut. Security forces intensified their presence in the city after the incident fearing sectarian clashes.

On the morning of 24 October, during the remand hearing, hundreds of Muslims gathered in front of the Dayrut municipal building waiting for the release of the four defendants, but they were detained for an additional 15 days. After the order was issued and the news spread, at about 10:30 am, some 2,000 Muslims headed to a residential area that is home to several Coptic-owned pharmacies and shops — specifically the Abu Gabal area — carrying clubs, sticks and iron implements and chanting religious slogans. They attacked churches and the diocese building, and

vandalized and looted Coptic property. Eyewitnesses told EIPR researchers that security forces did not intervene to stop the assailants until about 3 pm.

According to information obtained by the EIPR, assailants threw stones at the historic Church of Abu Seifein and the Virgin, breaking windows and its facade. They also attacked the Church of the Virgin, where the bishopric is located, throwing stones that broke its doors and the glass facade. The same thing was repeated at the Evangelical Church and the Church of the Archangel. The charitable clinic run by the Catholic church in Dayrut, which serves both Christians and Muslims in the district, was also attacked. The assailants attacked the pharmacy of Dr. Hani Hakim; its glass facade was broken and money and pharmaceuticals were stolen. The pharmacy of Dr. Ramsis Hanas was also attacked and looted, and Hanas's leg was broken as he tried to prevent the assailants from entering the pharmacy. Pharmacies owned by Dr. Adel Shawqi and Dr. Emad Kamal on al-Muallimin St. were also attacked. Several shops were broken into and also looted, including Hamis' ladies hair salon, Kiro's glass shop, Andrew's mobile phone shop, Ghawi Khusara's mobile phone shop, the Khan al-Khalili clothes shop, the GB clothes shop and Liliane's clothes shop. The assailants threw bricks at homes inhabited by Copts and also vandalized four cars owned by Christians.

The day after these events, security arrested 30 people; five were released and the remainder were referred to the Dayrut Public Prosecutor's Office, which placed them under preventive detention pending an investigation into charges of assembly, vandalism, theft and the destruction of private and public property. On 24 and 25 October, the police and the Prosecutor's Office surveyed the damage. According to a report in the daily newspaper *al-Masry al-Youm* on 26 October 2009, the prosecutor surveyed damage to eight shops, two pharmacies, two clinics and three cars owned by Christians in the Abu Gabal area.

On 29 and 30 October, new rumors spread and a flyer titled "Join" — a copy of which was obtained by the EIPR — was circulated calling for revenge against several people, among them a priest, a well-known lawyer, two brothers who own an optometry shop and a person who owns a hair salon and photography studio. The flyer named these individuals after rumors spread in the town that they were involved in producing and distributing the sex video of the Coptic boy and the Muslim girl, as part of an organized attempt to film Muslim women in sexually compromising positions in order to offend Muslims.

On 8 November, the Dayrut Public Prosecutor released six suspects, extended the remand of 19 others and referred them to a Dayrut criminal trial in case no. 16581/2009. On 13 December 2009, the court, headed by Judge Khaled Mustafa, acquitted all defendants of all charges. According to various press reports, the court based its ruling on the lack of eyewitnesses in the case and inconsistent statements between the defendants and victims. The EIPR was unable to obtain a copy of the

ruling. The Public Prosecutor appealed and a hearing on the appeal is set for 16 February 2010.

Christian clerics and some eyewitnesses told EIPR researchers that calm had returned to Dayrut and that the panic that seized Christians following the attacks had begun to subside. Some of the facilities that were attacked resumed business three days after the attacks.

12. On 27 October, the village of Nazlat al-Badraman in the Deir Mawas district of Minya was the scene of sectarian clashes between Muslims and Christians after Muslims protested the renovation of the bell tower of the Mar Girgis Church; those in charge of the church had obtained all the necessary permits from the competent authorities. The clashes left at least three people injured, among them a Muslim child, a Central Security officer, and a Christian teacher who was beaten inside a grocery store she owns. The church facade was damaged and some homes and property of local Christians were vandalized, including five cars, a cement warehouse and a sawmill; the contents of a private car were also stolen.

Father Sarabamun Agaban, the priest of the Mar Girgis Church, told EIPR researchers that the church had obtained a permit to demolish the old bell tower and build a new one in its place. When the renovation began, a resident of the village — Sabra Ahmed Saleh, 30 — and two other locals arrived and prevented the workers from working. Father Agaban said that he gathered together the workers and Christians present and took them into the church to protect them. The chief watchman in the village came with another watchman and attempted to stand up to Sabra, who told them, "I'll stop the construction even if State Security comes." Soon after, dozens of Muslims carrying canes and bricks assembled. The village mayor, Saber Moussa, then arrived and ordered the chief watchman to fire a few shots in the air to disperse the assembled crowd, at which point some 200 Muslims headed for the village streets where Christians live, attacking homes and destroying property. They entered several homes and broke electrical appliances, door and windows. Eyewitnesses said that these attacks did not last long and broke up before security forces reached the village.

That same evening and the following day, security forces arrested 22 Muslims and referred them to the Public Prosecutor's Office, where they were questioned and charged with vandalizing a church, inflaming strife, assembly, terrorizing citizens and disturbing the public order; they were detained for four days pending an investigation. On 30 October, the prosecutor released 17 of the suspects and renewed the remand of the remaining five, who were later released after a reconciliation agreement was filed with the prosecutor's office. On 30 October, security also arrested a Christian, Magdi Nagib Tawfiq, known as Fidi, and charged him with assaulting a Muslim named Mustafa Shaaban during the events. He was

brought before the prosecutor, who detained him for four days pending an investigation; he was released at the end of the four-day period.

A customary reconciliation meeting was held on 29 October, attended by General Mustafa Tawfiq, the former director of security in Aswan and a prominent native of the village; his brother Ahmed Tawfiq, a member of the Shura Council for Deir Mawas; Alaa Hassanein, an MP for the district; and Father Sarabamun Agaban, the church pastor. Reconciliation was concluded at the meeting and Copts agreed to withdraw all criminal charges “to restore friendship, coexistence and calm to the village,” according to a statement by the priest. The Muslims present pledged not to harm Christians or attack their property or homes. It was also agreed to compensate some Christians for the damages, donated by General Mustafa Tawfiq who also supplied the funds to repair the damaged cars owned by Copts. The reconciliation also stated that renovation would resume on the church bell tower, and work began on 1 November, amid a heavy security presence outside the church. Construction was underway at the time this report was written.

13. At dawn on 28 October 2009, a tailoring and cloth shop owned by a Copt Noshi Shenouda Boulos in the city of Esna, located in the Luxor governorate, was torched and the contents burned. The fire took place after an argument between Boulos and his Muslim neighbor, Murtada al-Sayyed al-Sadeq, the owner of a barbershop, over the latter playing radio recitations of the Qur’an at a high volume.

Boulos told EIPR researchers that his neighbor had played the Qur’an at an extremely loud volume all day, making it hard for him to deal with customers, and that this problem was long-standing. Two years ago, the Esna police issued a warning to the barbershop owner to lower the volume of his radio and/or television, which he heeded. But starting last Ramadan he began playing the Qur’an at high volume again and continued after the conclusion of Ramadan; his son would also stand at the door of Boulos’s shop and repeatedly voice religious expressions. Boulos said that the evening before his shop was torched, he had argued with al-Sadeq over this issue and that during the fight al-Sadeq insulted him with religious smears and threatened to burn down his shop.

Boulos told EIPR researchers that at 3 am on 28 October, he received a call from his neighbor, Abd al-Baset Abd al-Salam, telling him that his shop was on fire. Boulos called the police, and the police and the prosecutor’s office came to confirm and survey the losses. He also informed them about his previous arguments with his neighbor. After being summoned for questioning, al-Sadeq denied any connection with the fire. Several neighbors intervened and, estimating the damage to be in the range of LE4,000, suggested that each party shoulder half the cost. They agreed and filed a reconciliation report promising not to harm one another; Boulos also withdrew his charge against al-Sadeq. Faisal Abd al-Rahman, an MP for the Esna

district, conducted another reconciliation meeting attended by nearly 300 citizens, among them Muslim and Christian clerics, to calm sectarian tensions in the city.

Esna had witnessed violent sectarian clashes in December 2007 during which Coptic-owned shops were torched and destroyed, the facade of the Church of the Virgin was smashed and the Three Farmers Shrine was vandalized, following a dispute between a Christian and a Muslim.

14. On 6 November, a fight between Muslims and Christians in Ezbat Shahin, located in the city of Minya, turned into sectarian attacks that left three Copts injured, three livestock pens torched, a car vandalized and the fronts of several homes vandalized. According to information received by the EIPR, the fight erupted between Reda Yehya Kamal, a Christian, and several Muslims after Kamal ran into some Muslim children on his motorbike at about 9 pm. The fight was broken up, but the same evening, several Muslims attacked Kamal's house, throwing stones at it and setting fire to three livestock pens he owns. Kamal and his two brothers, Ashraf and Sherif, were injured during the attacks. The same group vandalized several nearby homes, as well as a car owned by a Muslim that was parked in the street. Security forces reached the village after the violence erupted and took control of the situation, arresting eight people, among them three Copts, and referring them to the Public Prosecutor's Office, which charged them with vandalizing private property and disturbing public order. Although the suspects were released four days later, the Interior Ministry issued administrative detention orders for three of them, among them Sherif Kamal; all three were transferred to the New Valley Prison.

An eyewitness told EIPR researchers that the two parties conducted a reconciliation meeting the day after the events, in which it was agreed that they would declare their reconciliation before a prosecutor. Nevertheless, the Interior Ministry had not released the three detainees at the time this report was written. Father Sharubim Hanna, the priest at the Church of the Archangel in Ezbat Shahin, added that Coptic-Muslim relations in the town were strong and that "the whole story is just a dispute between two young men. It happens everywhere, and some people just inflated it, and then people assembled and attacked some homes. Right now things are calm, and security and representatives from the People's Assembly, Shura Council and local council helped achieve this."

15. On the evening of 15 November 2009, some 100 Muslims amassed and attacked an apartment holding two Christian young men and three Muslim young women in the city of Mallawi in Minya, after a rumor spread in the city that they were engaged in sex in the apartment. One of the young Christians was beaten and stabbed several times in the head and ear while the other managed to escape. Assembled Muslims then walked through the city streets chanting anti-Christian slogans and throwing stones at some Coptic-owned shops, damaging the storefronts of several of them



and one pharmacy. Following security directives, Coptic owners of the shops had closed their doors as soon the attacks began.

Security forces arrived after the events began and managed to take control of the assembled crowd, imposing a curfew and warning Christians to stay in their homes. The injured man was taken to the Mallawi General Hospital, but the hospital refused to admit him because of his poor condition and he was taken to the Assiout University Hospital. The police station filed a police report, no. 3987/2009/administrative/Mallawi.

Church sources in Mallawi told EIPR researchers that security acted quickly to contain the crisis and was able to protect Christians' property from attack. Father Moussa Girgis said that the injured young man and the three Muslim girls were still detained at the time this report was written.

16. Copts were targeted in large-scale sectarian attacks in the Farshout and Abu Tisht districts of Qena starting on Thursday, 19 November 2009, through Monday, 23 November. According to information obtained by the EIPR, large crowds of Muslims, sometimes as many as a few thousand, moved at different times during this period and in various areas and villages in the two districts, attacking many Christian-owned shops, pharmacies, cars, homes and fields; church sources estimated the damage at LE4.39 million.

The attacks began when a Muslim family from the village of al-Shoqeifi in the Abu Tisht district lodged an official complaint on 18 November accusing a Christian, Girgis Baroumi Girgis, 21, a resident of al-Kom al-Ahmar in Farshout, of raping their 12-year-old daughter after forcing her into a nearby agricultural field. Security forces arrested the suspect the same day the complaint was filed; he was questioned by the Public Prosecutor's Office and remanded for four days pending an investigation.

The following day some villages in the Farshout district, as well as some in the neighboring Abu Tisht district, began to show signs of rising sectarian tensions until they exploded on 21-23 November.

On 19 November, Father Benjamin Noshi, the pastor at the Church of the Archangel and St. Shenouda, located in the Khawalid village of Abu Tisht, was returning to his home in al-Qalaiya in his car with a deacon, Murtada Gaber Rizqallah, when a group of young men carrying canes, knives and firearms stopped the car right before al-Shoqeifi, the home of the raped Muslim girl. Father Benjamin told EIPR researchers that the men attacked them and broke the car windshield even though a police car was nearby. He called for help from the police, but they took no action. He added that the deacon was later admitted to the Abu Tisht Hospital with a head wound and bruising behind his ear. He filed a police report about the incident, after

which his car was taken to the police station for inspection to confirm the report. On 21 November, he decided to withdraw the complaint “out of fear of abuse,” he said.

On Friday, 20 November, the security apparatus asked 15 Christian families in al-Kom al-Ahmar, the residence of the rape suspect, to leave the village immediately for fear of their lives. Church sources told the EIPR that some went to the St. Bedaba Monastery in Naga Hammadi, while others went to stay with relatives in other villages and cities. The sources added that several families returned to the village after the situation stabilized in early December, but not the family of the rape suspect.

At dawn on 21 November, things began to take a violent turn when fires erupted in three shops owned by Christians in Farshout. A Muslim eyewitness told EIPR researchers that he saw flames coming out of a clothing store across the street from his house at about 2:30 am. He informed the owner, Gamal Fahim, who called security and firefighters after which he went to the shop and, with the help of some neighbors and local residents, tried in vain to put out the fire; all the contents of the shop were ultimately destroyed. On Saturday morning, priests warned Christians not to open their shops or pharmacies, fearing that some Muslims might harass them or attack their property.

The same morning, many Muslims, particularly from the al-Hawara tribe, to which the raped girl belonged, gathered in front of the Farshout police station demanding that security turn over the Christian man so he could be killed. Police refused. As a result of the gathering, the judge at the Farshout Criminal Court moved the investigation to the Qena Criminal Court, which later set the opening of the trial for 17 January 2010; the case was postponed to 17 February, when testimonies from the victim, her parents and forensic pathologists will be heard.

According to eyewitnesses, the crowd that gathered outside the police station that morning numbered several thousand and included Muslims from al-Shoqeifi and nearby villages as well as many Azhar students in Farshout. At about 11 am, the crowd began moving in separate groups carrying canes, gas canisters, knives and metal implements. They attacked Christian-owned property, broke down shop doors and burned them after looting their contents. Eyewitnesses, including Muslims, said that the assailants would open the doors of shops and pharmacies, and young boys would go in and steal the contents, after which the shops were set on fire.

The attacks continued without interruption until 10 pm, as the mobs moved from one area to another. Several victims and eyewitnesses stated that security arrived about 90 minutes after the assaults began, but did not engage with any of the assailants for several hours. The EIPR also received photos and video footage from

the Naga Hammadi bishopric and some Coptic websites showing the assaults underway despite the presence of security forces nearby.

The security forces imposed order on Saturday evening, after calling for additional forces from the Sohag and Assyout governorates. Many sources told EIPR researchers that security forces arrested about 70 of the assailants and referred them to the prosecutor, who ordered the release of 15 minors to their families and three others, and remanded 52 others for 15 days pending an investigation; the suspects were charged with rioting, assembly, arson and destruction of private property. Throughout December and January, several of the detainees were released for various causes, but an unknown number were still detained at the time this report was written, with no indictment order issued so far.

The victims from Farshout filed a complaint with the General Prosecutor's Office in Qena, which sent a joint team from the Public Prosecutor's Office, the criminal investigations' office and the city council to survey the shops damaged in the attacks.

The attacks spread to the village of Abu Shousha, located in the nearby Abu Tisht district, 30 km from al-Shoqeifi, where at dawn on 23 November, Albert's Pharmacy and three other shops were torched: a textile store owned by Tamer Nagi Agaybi, a shoe shop and an appliance store owned by Iyad Shafiq, according to a statement from Father Boulos Nazir, a priest at the Abu Shousha church. The afternoon of the same day groups of Muslims set fire to houses, shops and property owned by Christians in al-Kom al-Ahmar.

In a telephone interview with EIPR researchers in late November 2009, Father Kyrillos, the bishop of Naga Hammadi, said that he had warned the security authorities before the attacks on 21 November and had asked them to step up the security presence in the area in fear of retaliation, particularly given the signs of rising tension. The bishop added that the church had called General Magdi Ayoub, the governor of Qena, after the attacks to ask for compensation for the victims, but he refused and turned the matter over to the director of security, who did not respond. Church sources estimate losses in the Farshout and Abu Tisht districts to exceed LE4.39 million. The attacks damaged five pharmacies, a tour bus, a transport truck, more than 50 shops and a Coptic association. The EIPR received a copy of the detailed inventory of the losses prepared by the church.

In the days following the attacks, the security apparatus convened small meetings with families in the villages of Farshout and Abu Tisht to warn them to maintain calm, refrain from attacking the lives or property of Christians and avoid listening to any incendiary ideas, according to a person who took part in one of these meetings. The security apparatus asked the church and the victims to convene a broad, official

reconciliation meeting to cover the entire district of Farshout; the church refused, asking for compensation before the reconciliation meeting.

Sources told EIPR researchers during December 2009 that Father Kyrillos received promises from the Papal Office in Cairo that compensation would be disbursed before Christmas, but it did not arrive until 11 January 2010, after the Christmas Eve attacks in Naga Hammadi. A committee from the Ministry for Local Development disbursed compensation for the victims of the Farshout and Abu Tisht attacks in the amount of LE335,000, including LE250,000 from the Ministry of Local Development and LE85,000 from the Pharmacists Syndicate. Victims were eligible for LE1,200-30,000 depending on the value of losses incurred. The Public Prosecutor estimated that 42 shops, a pharmacy and a bookstore had been damaged, and 42 people were named eligible for compensation.

17. At dawn on 1 December 2009, a fire broke out in the St. Mark's Church located in the center of the Coptic cemetery on Tirsas Road in the Sanouras district of Fayyoun. The fire destroyed the church altar, electrical appliances, the iconostasis and most of the wooden pews. Hegumen Mikhail Stras, the trustee of the Fayyoun bishopric, said that the church had no guard and that priests found that the lock on the gate had been broken. They also found two small gas canisters, one in the altar and another between the pews.

The EIPR learned from other local sources that security came to the church as soon as they were alerted to the fire and that the Fayyoun Prosecutor's Office had launched an investigation to determine whether the fire was arson. The report from the criminal lab had not yet been issued as of the writing of this report, nor had permits to renovate the church, although local and security authorities have promised to issue the permits soon.

### **III. Security Interventions and Harassment**

18. Kawthar Ahmed al-Faw filed a complaint with the Public Prosecutor's Office (no. 18917/2009/petitions/Public Prosecutor) on 21 October 2009 asking that the state secure her family's return to their home in the village of al-Shuraniya, located in the Maragha district of Sohag. The family of the complainant, in addition to three other Baha'i families, were forced to leave the village pursuant to security orders following sectarian attacks that targeted Baha'i homes in the town from 28 to 31 March 2009, which left several homes torched (see paragraph 18 of the First Quarterly Report, 2009). The complaint was referred to the Maragha Prosecutor's Office, which took the complainant's statement on 25 December. She accused several security officials in the Maragha district and State Security police from preventing her and her family from returning to their home, and she asked the prosecutor to order her return and compel the Interior Ministry to implement the order, while also pledging that she would not be harmed by residents of the village that she alleged

had helped to expel her along with security personnel. The prosecutor's office did not issue an order and simply included the complaint in the investigation being conducted by the office into case no. 1192/2009/administrative/Maragha, regarding the sectarian attacks in Shuraniya. That investigation has been underway since April 2009 and was still pending at the time this report was written.

19. The Khalifa neighborhood authority in Cairo, backed up by security forces, demolished a services building owned by the Mar Mina al-Agaybi Association in the Ibagiya area of Cairo on 22 October 2009 on the grounds that the building was unlicensed. Father Kyrillos Manour, the priest in charge, told EIPR researchers that the building belongs to the Mar Mina Association, established in 1980, and that the association is permitted to hold worship services and religious rites there serving 160 families in the Ibagiya, Khalifa and Sayyeda Aisha areas. He added that association officials bought a 200-meter plot of land in front of the association headquarters and built a brick wall around the land in 1996. They then built a watchman's room and another room to serve as a warehouse without seeking official permits "since the association is located in an informal slum area where the government does not grant construction permits." He added that the demolished building was used to offer literacy and computer courses and that it was demolished with no prior notice.

20. The daily *al-Dustour* reported on 24 October 2009 that security forces had surrounded the village of Danasour, located in the Shuhada district of Menoufiya, with a heavy deployment of the police in the village on the morning of 23 October. The deployment was initiated to prevent eruption of sectarian violence after a Christian family in the village, the Awadallah family, had built a concrete structure resembling a church on their privately owned land. Father Gabriel Awad, a Coptic pastor in the area, told EIPR researchers that Nagib Awadallah obtained a decree from the city council to build a three-story structure whose ground floor would be a carpentry workshop, with the other two floors to be used for residential purposes. The priest added that in the wake of a marital dispute, Awadallah's wife filed a complaint with State Security police in June 2009 against her husband, saying that he intended to turn the building into a church. After receiving the complaint, the security apparatus took charge of the building and deployed an eight-man permanent guard there with shift changes every 12 hours. Awadallah signed an affidavit saying that the building was to be a house and pledging not to use it as a church after he was summoned to State Security headquarters in late June 2009 and questioned about the purposes of the structure; he was released the same day. Father Gabriel Awad said that Awadallah was treated well and was not abused in any way. He added that security forces are heavily deployed every Friday fearing attacks on Christians. For several years now, he has been conducting the weekly mass in the home of a local Christian with the knowledge and consent of the security establishment.

21. Authorities at the Cairo airport detained the Shi'ite writer Dr. Ahmed Rasem al-Nafis on Saturday, 24 October 2009 from 4 pm until 8 pm and prohibited him from traveling to Tehran, Iran to attend a conference on "The Two Martyrs." Al-Nafis told EIPR researchers that airport security officers informed him that he could travel, but not on that day on that flight, although they lacked any official or court order. He added that he was allowed to travel on 26 October after undergoing a thorough search, which was repeated when he returned to Cairo on 3 November.

Al-Nafis underwent a similar experience in mid-August when he was prevented from flying to Beirut and forced to postpone his trip for two days. Upon his return, he was detained by airport authorities for five hours, during which he was searched and some of his personal belongings confiscated, including a digital camera and religious CDs and others materials.

22. On 26 October 2009, Lieutenant Colonel Kamal Radwan with the State Security police in Naga Hammadi ordered Christian citizen Hani Rizqallah Shehata to leave his home in the city of Naga Hammadi with his brother and move to Cairo, following rumors in the city that he was engaged in a relationship with a Muslim woman. Shehata told EIPR researchers that State Security police officers searched his work office and that Lt. Col. Radwan told him, "You need to leave town instead of me arresting you and your brother."

In a statement to EIPR researchers, Shehata said that his family had good relations with the family of a Muslim woman who lives in the Naga Hammadi district. On 10 October, the woman came to his apartment, where he was alone, to take a sum of money that she had left with him. A few minutes after she entered the apartment, some 15-20 Muslim youths came to the apartment and cursed the woman while beating Shehata and filming the assault with a mobile phone. They then stole some items in the apartment, including two mobile phones and LE1,000, and also took the woman's phone and the money in her possession.

Shehata said that the young men distributed the video to residents of Naga Hammadi in order to show a Christian being beaten and humiliated, after which he received threats from some Muslims in town, who also extorted money from him under threat of further assault. He said that some of these people were known in town for their connections to a certain parliamentarian.

The Muslim woman's lawyers filed a complaint (no. 19281/2009/petitions/Public Prosecutor) on 1 November with the Public Prosecutor's Office naming an MP from the Naga Hammadi district, the director of security in Qena, a State Security office in the Naga Hammadi district, and several other people. In the complaint, a copy of which was obtained by the EIPR, her attorneys warned of a sectarian strife in Qena

because some residents of the city were shooting video footage of their client interacting with a local Coptic man on routine matters and alleging that it was an adulterous affair; the complaint also stated that this was damaging to her dignity and her family's reputation. The Qena Appellate Prosecutor's Office summoned the woman on 20 November to give a statement.

EIPR researchers learned that Shehata had returned to Naga Hammadi in early December with the consent of the security apparatus after he had used up all his vacation time at work. Upon his return, he found that his superiors had decided to transfer him from his previous position as a computer technician to a position on the company floor. State Security officers returned some of the items taken from his apartment while an MP gave him the money that he had paid when he was blackmailed; the prosecutor returned the money through Father Kyrillos, the bishop of Naga Hammadi.

The Muslim woman told a similar story to EIPR researchers, adding that Father Kyrillos asked her to withdraw her complaint and use reconciliation channels; she refused, insisting on claiming her rights after her reputation was damaged. No action had been taken on the complaint at the time this report was written.

23. Police in the district of Samalout in the Minya governorate arrested Maurice Salama Sharqawi, a 48-year-old teacher from the village of Deir Samalout, on the evening of 27 October 2009 after accusing him of organizing Christian gatherings and worship services in his home with the participation of some Christian clerics and without a permit.

Sharqawi told EIPR researchers that he held a commemorative wake for his uncle, who had died one year earlier, on 24 October. "Since there is no church in the village that can host such occasions, I asked Father Elia Shafiq, a village cleric, to come to my house to conduct the benediction, which was attended by 50 family members." Sharqawi added that he was suddenly summoned by police on 27 October, during which a police report was filed (no. 8651/2009/administrative/Samalout) and he was questioned by a prosecutor. He was released on 29 October after signing a pledge "not to hold religious services or organize Christian gatherings in his house."

Sharqawi told EIPR researchers that immediately after he was arrested, State Security police in Minya appointed a two-man guard on his house, in addition to a policeman and a village watchman; the guard was still deployed at the time this report was written. He added that this interfered with his family's comings and goings and their daily routine, saying that the deployment of the guard had caused some tension between his family and other villagers.

24. On 18 November, security forces at the Cairo International Airport stopped and detained Abd al-Latif Mohamed Said, a Qur'anist, while he was on the way to Sudan to cheer for the Egyptian national team during a match against Algeria the same day. The day after he was detained, EIPR lawyers filed an urgent complaint with the Public Prosecutor's Office (no. 20487/2009/petitions/Public Prosecutor) asking for an investigation into the illegal detention.

The complaint stated that Said was arrested at the Cairo airport after obtaining an exit stamp on his passport; he was prohibited from traveling and the stamp was annulled, after which he was arrested and arbitrarily detained in Terminal 1 of the airport. Cairo security officers transferred Said to State Security police headquarters in Shubra al-Kheima the next day, where he was held for one week before being released on 25 November 2009.

Abd al-Latif Said was prohibited from travel in a similar incident in April 2009 without cause, based on directives from State Security police. The EIPR filed a lawsuit with the Court of Administrative Justice (no. 37542/63) against the Minister of Interior, the head of the Public Security Agency and the head of the Passports, Emigration and Naturalization Agency seeking a suspension of the travel ban. The court is scheduled to rule on the case on 30 March.

Said was previously arrested under the provisions of the Emergency Law in May 2007 for his Qur'anist beliefs. The Supreme State Security Court overturned the order and compelled the Supreme State Security Prosecutor's Office to release him in September 2007, after he and four others were questioned on charges of defaming Islam by their denial of the Prophetic Sunna.

25. In October 2009, the Supreme State Security Prosecutor's Office ordered the release of Hassan Shehata Youssef and 11 other citizens who were detained for five months pending an investigation (no. 624/2009/Supreme State Security) into charges of forming an organization to disseminate Shi'ite beliefs that harm Islam and Sunni confessions and receiving funds from abroad (see paragraph 21 of the Third Quarterly Report, 2009). After the release order was issued, however, the Interior Ministry renewed the detention order for at least 11 of the defendants and they were still detained in the Damanhour Prison at the time this report was written. There have been conflicting reports as to whether Shehata was released or subject to a renewed detention order.

Citing sources in the Interior Ministry, the press reported on 25 November that Shehata and the other detainees had been released. Hamza, Shehata's son, denied that his father had been released in a statement to *al-Dustour* on 27 November, saying that he, his brothers, uncles and family had no information about the release. The EIPR also received phone calls from some of the detainees' family members confirming that they had not been released as of January 2010.



#### IV. Religious Discrimination

26. Copts in the village of Abu Shousha, located in the Abu Tisht district of Qena, organized a demonstration at the Papal Office of the Orthodox Coptic Church in Cairo on 8 October 2009 demanding that Pope Shenouda intervene with officials to secure approval for the replacement and reconstruction of the Father Antonius Church in the village. Father Boulos Nazir, the church priest, told EIPR researchers that a fire erupted in the church on 9 October 2005 causing cracks in the building and that they were afraid the church would collapse on worshippers during church services, particularly since this is the only church in the region, home to an estimated 5,000 Copts. Father Boulos added that village Copts had applied for a demolition and reconstruction order with the Qena governor in November 2005, attaching a copy of the church blueprints and a statement of the number of villages the church serves; the church is on a plot of land measuring 13 qirats and 13 sahms (a little more than 1/2 a feddan), while the building itself measures 3 qirats and 12 sahms (a little more 1/8 of a feddan), with the church courtyard occupying the rest of the plot. Pursuant to the application, the governor formed a committee headed by the director of housing in northern Qena, and including the director of the local engineering department and a member of the governorate's legal department, to survey the church. The committee's report, a copy of which was obtained by the EIPR, was issued on 26 June 2006 and states that the building is unsafe, unfit for use and cannot be repaired. According to the report, there are large cracks all over the building in areas that constitute a danger and are "irreparable according to the technical opinion." The governorate charged another committee to survey the church in August 2006, this one with the Abu Tisht City Council. The new committee's report, a copy of which was obtained by the EIPR, was issued on 24 August 2006 and concluded that the building could be renovated under the supervision of an engineering consultant. Father Boulos said that as a result of the conflicting opinions, the governorate wanted to appoint a third committee from the Center for Housing Research in Cairo, part of the Ministry of Housing, but that the committee asked that the church pay LE60,000 for a survey of the building. The fee was reduced to LE45,000 and then LE40,000 after the church complained; ultimately the church agreed to pay the fee on condition that the committee's opinion be binding, but the committee declared that it's opinion was simply a recommendation. As a result, the church concluded there was no use in the survey and refused to pay the fee, and the church building remained untouched.

27. The Maghagha and Adwa Bishopric in the governorate of Minya issued a statement on Friday, 23 October 2009, a copy of which was obtained by the EIPR, announcing that the bishopric would engage in "a periodic fast" and daily masses for three days starting on Monday, 26 October "to ask for divine intervention to resolve some of the diocese's problems." The statement did not elaborate on the nature of these problems, but the daily *al-Masry al-Youm* reported on 27 October that

the fast was undertaken to protest “some problems with government bodies related to the construction and renovation of churches.” The paper reported that Father Ezra Fangari, a priest in the diocese, said that the bishopric “has no other recourse but to turn to God and ask for His help, having despaired of a response from officials...All requests filed by the bishopric with official bodies regarding the construction or repair of churches, and even repairs to a bathroom, have gone unanswered.” Fangari added, “It has gotten so that Copts in the parish are prohibited from building homes on the grounds that they might convert them into churches.”

In related news, the press reported that Father Aghathon, the bishop of Maghagha and Adwa, refused to congratulate General Ahmed Diya'a al-Din, the governor of Minya, on the occasion of Eid al-Adha on 27 November, to protest the governor's refusal to issue construction and renovation permits for churches in the area.

The EIPR notes that in the two years it has issued its quarterly reports on freedom of religion and belief, it has documented several problems related to construction and renovation permits for churches and instances of worship services held in Christian service centers. The reports have also documented cases involving Christians constructing houses in Minya that in some instances have escalated into sectarian violence.

## V. Laws, Decrees and Political Developments

28. The Minister of Culture issued decree no. 508/2009 amending the borders of the Abu Fana Monastery compound, registered as a national antiquity by Ministerial Decree 10357/1951. The monastery is located in the village of Qasr Hor in the Mallawi district of Minya. Although the decree was originally issued on 13 May 2009, it was not published in the *Official Gazette* until 26 December 2009. Sectarian clashes took place in the area of the Abu Fana Monastery in 2008 because of a dispute about ownership of the land surrounding the monastery between local Bedouins and monks. The clashes left one Muslim farmer dead, shot by a still unknown source, and seven monks injured, three of whom were kidnapped by Bedouins (see paragraph 10 of the Second Quarterly Report, 2008).

The decree, approved by the Permanent Committee on Islamic and Coptic Monuments in a meeting held on 20 July 2008, amended the borders of the monastery compound as follows: 500 meters shall be taken from the northern wall of the monastery heading east for 200 meters, breaking at the southeast for 300 meters then east for 180 meters; from the south, 500 meters shall be taken from the southern wall of the monastery for 390 meters heading east; from the east, 400 meters shall be taken from the eastern wall of the monastery for 750 meters heading north. From the west, the monastery compound shall extend to the borders of the Christian cemetery currently in use, with the addition of a plot of land measuring 22 qirats and 13

sahms (a little less than one feddan), owned by the Supreme Council of Antiquities, located between the monastery's western wall and the cemetery.

At the same time, the Mallawi bishopric in Minya on 21 October implemented an order issued by Minya governor Ahmed Diya'a al-Din to raise the height of the wall around the Abu Fana Monastery to four meters; previous sections had been built at a height of 1.5 meters. A church source told the EIPR that the bishopric received an official letter from the Minya Governor's Office on 18 October approving the adjustments to the wall. A delegation from the Mallawi bishopric, led by Father Dimitrius, the bishop of Mallawi and Ashmonin, visited the Minya governor in his office on 21 October to thank him for approving the bishopric's request to start work on the second phase of heightening the walls of the Abu Fana Monastery.

Hegemon Bula Anwar, the trustee of the bishopric, told EIPR researchers that the bishopric started raising the walls after the governor's approval and are finishing the wall around the ancient compound inside the monastery, bringing all the water and electricity infrastructure inside the wall and paying the required fees for each feddan, in accordance with the regulations of the governorate and the Agency for Agricultural Development and Land Reclamation. Anwar considered the governor's decision to be a positive step and the fulfillment of promises made. He added that the permit allows the walls to be heightened from three directions only — south, west and east — from 1.5 meters to 4 meters, as the monastery requested. However, the status of the eastern wall, which was the point of dispute with neighboring Bedouins, is still unclear. Both the monastery and its Muslim neighbors are seeking to buy the state-owned land adjacent to the monastery from the east as a means of laying exclusive claim to the land.

29. The General Agency for the National Library and Egyptian Archives issued a statement on 1 October 2009 responding to objections to Law 8/2009 on the protection of manuscripts, ratified by the President in February 2009. According to the statement, there are objections that "the law is aimed, first and foremost, at destroying Coptic history and erasing Coptic civilization." The agency said that such criticisms were "a stab at the patriotism, and even religion, of every person who helped to prepare and issue this law. Sincere Egyptians are not content to see one of the most ancient and dearest periods of its civilization disappear — Coptic civilization — which concerns all Egyptians regardless of religion, nor are Muslims of sound faith pleased with the appropriation of the property of others." The agency said, "We must distinguish between private and public ownership. The manuscripts in the possession of monasteries are not the property of the church, but the property of Egypt and its people. These manuscripts do not tell the history of Christianity in Egypt, but rather the history of Egypt under Christianity."

The statement, a copy of which was obtained by the EIPR, added that the law protecting manuscripts "was issued in its final form to assuage the conscience of

every sincere patriot and avoid impinging on the freedom of ownership while also protecting the right of the Egyptian people to know their heritage and protect it from injury or destruction." The statement added that the National Library and Archives seeks to offer coming generations "the manuscripts of their forebears as a witness to the greatness and splendor of the past, to give them hope of clearing out the obscurantist thought, cultural regressions and intellectual rigidity that has marred the present."

The law to protect manuscripts, issued in February 2009, requires any person possessing a pre-modern manuscript or a book that constitutes a singular intellectual or artistic endeavor and whose preservation is deemed by the General Agency for the National Library and Egyptian Archives to be in the national interest to inform the agency about the manuscript or book so that it can be registered; the manuscript will remain in the owner's possession with the promise that he will preserve it.

30. The Orthodox Coptic Church held its annual conference for faith affirmation on 1 October in the governorate of Fayyoun, titled "Attempts at Sectarian Invasion: Types, Dimensions and How to Confront It." The conference discussed what church leaders dubbed "the evangelical war" and plans by the evangelical church to penetrate the Orthodox Coptic Church and peel away adherents. The daily newspaper *Al-Masry al-Youm* reported on 3 October that Father Bishoi, the secretary of the Holy Synod and the bishop of Damietta, exposed what he called "an evangelical plan to convert Orthodox Copts into Protestants in 20 years. He added that the plan is not an invasion or external attack, but rather infiltration from within."

Father Safwat al-Bayadi, the president of the evangelical community, denied the charge, telling the press, "Evangelicals call for freedom of thought and belief and do not hinder anyone's thought or belief." He added, "We have taught our children to know their faith well. The door is open for anyone, and we do not hinder anyone or force him to adopt a particular confession or thought." The evangelical community also issued a statement published in several newspapers protesting Father Bishoi's attack on evangelicals during the conference. The statement was sent to Pope Shenouda III, the patriarch of Alexandria and the Holy See of St. Mark, to apprise him of the evangelical community's official position.

31. The Supreme Council of al-Azhar issued a decree on 8 October banning female students and faculty from wearing the *niqab*, or full face veil, in classrooms in Azhar institutions. In a statement, the council said that the decree would be implemented in the primary, preparatory and secondary levels, as well as all female dormitories. The statement said that female students who wish to wear the *niqab* can do so at home, the streets and the campus of the institution at which they study, but it was prohibited inside female-only classrooms taught by female teachers.

According to the council's statement, a copy of which was obtained by the EIPR, the council also decided to prohibit female students at all educational levels in al-Azhar institutions and its university from wearing the *niqab* in female-only examination halls supervised by female rectors and monitors. The council said that the decree is not against a woman wearing the *niqab* in her private life, public conduct or work, "but against the use of this right in inappropriate circumstances such that it instills this idea in the minds of young girls and followers of the minority opinion, which contravenes the opinion of the majority of jurists that the face of a woman is not shameful."

At the same time, the Islamic Research Council announced in its meeting of 31 October that it supports the decree banning the *niqab* in Azhar classrooms, examination halls and dormitories. Members of the council said that the council's decree is consistent with Islamic legal provisions, since the *niqab* is not a duty; rather, women are required to cover their entire body with the exception of the face and hands (see paragraph 3 of this report).

32. General Abu Bakr al-Gindi, the chair of the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, said in a press conference held on 10 October, "We cannot, under any circumstances, announce the number of Copts in Egypt, even if we had accurate data on the matter," according to the daily *al-Shorouk* in its 11 October issue. The paper added that al-Gindi reiterated that "there is no data on this subject [the number of Copts] at all." Al-Gindi's statements came in response to a report issued on 1 October by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, part of the American Pew Charitable Trusts. The report stated that there are approximately 78.5 million Muslims in Egypt, who constitute 94.6% of the population. Religious minorities constitute only 5.4% of the Egyptian population, or about 4.5 million of Egypt's 83 million inhabitants, according to the report.

33. The online newspaper *al-Youm al-Sab'a* reported on 4 November 2009 that Osama al-Sheikh, the chair of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union, said in a seminar held at the media department of Cairo University on 2 November that "women in headscarves will not appear as presenters on the television screen." Al-Sheikh also reportedly told attendees at the seminar, "You will not see headscarfed women on Egyptian television." He justified his stance by saying, "The rule is that female television presenters not wear the headscarf, because exposing one's hair is part of the social culture. Since we present media content, there is a conventional way of doing things. This does not mean that a woman in a headscarf is bad. They can work for other satellite channels."

34. In his weekly address of Wednesday, 4 November, Pope Shenouda III, the patriarch of Alexandria and Holy See of St. Mark, denied any intention of amending the bylaws for the selection of the Coptic patriarch. He reiterated that this decision was final and irrevocable.

It is thought that the Pope's statements came in response to growing demands from secular Copts that the Orthodox Coptic patriarch be chosen via direct elections in which all members of the church participate, rather than the current system in which the patriarch is chosen by a vote among members of a committee made up of bishops.

35. In a press conference held on 7 November, Minister of Awqaf Mahmoud Hamdi Zaqzouq announced new rules for bringing mosques and community run prayer corners into the ministry, to prevent what he called a manipulation of the current rules and "to plug all the loopholes for those who do not follow their consciences in applying the bylaws set by the ministry."

The daily *al-Dustour* reported on 8 November that the minister said, "The new measures involve the reconstitution of the survey committee to include the chair of the civic mosque department, an engineer, a legal advisor and the director of the department to which the mosque belongs. Each member of the committee shall sign his full name to the survey in a clear hand. No mosques or prayer corners shall be approved for survey if they are located in government buildings or if they are delineated by walls or established on agricultural land, appropriated land, government property or canals without the written consent of the competent authorities."

In an interview with the daily *Roze al-Youssef* published on 24 October, the Minister of Awqaf had said, "The ministry is not building new mosques, but regular citizens are building on the condition that they comply with the conditions on mosque construction set by ministerial cabinet." Zaqzouq said the most important conditions were the prohibition on the establishment of prayer corners on the ground floor of buildings; that there should be 500 meters separating each mosque; and that the ground floor of the mosque be established for services, such as a clinic or literacy classes. The mosque should also be no smaller than 175 square meters, the reason being that most people build on agricultural land and 175 square meters is equal to one qirat. According to the paper, the minister said, "After the bill for a unified call to prayer is complete, microphones in mosques and prayer corners will disappear because there will no longer be any use for them. Still, the important thing is that...we still have a big problem: namely, that we have 104,000 mosques, but we do not have 104,000 imams appointed by the Ministry of Awqaf. We have only 50,000 appointed imams. For the rest, we use mosque preachers only on Friday."

36. Father Basanti, the bishop of Helwan and Maasara, said in an interview published in the daily newspaper *al-Masry al-Youm* on 11 November that Dr. Mufid Shehab, the Minister of State for Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, told him privately that "a quota [for Copts in representative councils] is not in your interest. You're not incapable of succeeding in parliament and you're not strangers." The bishop said that Shehab promised him in return a new electoral system — namely, a list system

— on the condition that Coptic candidates would be named to the top of the lists. He also promised the bishop that they would have 15-20 % representation in the parliament. Father Basanti added that Copts “will not change decisions inside the parliament, but rather stand heart and soul with the majority opinion, but this percentage will be an expression of Egypt’s eminence.”

For his part, in a press conference held to mark the opening of the new parliamentary session, held the same day the interview was published, Dr. Mufid Shehab denied making any promises to Father Basanti about the use of the proportional list system in the coming parliamentary elections. He reiterated that Copts are able to run for and succeed in elections without a quota, adding, “It is inconceivable for me to promise Father Basanti that we would use the proportional list system in the coming elections after President Mubarak already settled the matter,” referring to the use of the individual candidate system in the coming elections. The evening of the same day, Father Basanti commented on several satellite channels that Shehab had called him denying that they had had a conversation in which electoral promises were made. Basanti said that there was some confusion on his part without making further clarifications.

37. In an interview published in *al-Watani al-Youm*, the mouthpiece newspaper of the ruling National Democratic Party, on 24 November 2009, General Ahmed Diya'a al-Din, the governor of Minya, denied the existence of any sectarian strife in Minya. “Since he had the honor to be appointed governor of Minya, he has faced not one sectarian incident in Minya, contrary to reports,” the interview said. “He challenges anyone who alleges any sectarian incidents.” The governor defined his understanding of sectarian strife as “an incident motivated by a religious or faith-based viewpoint that compels partisans of a certain religion to attempt to bring people from one religious community into another religion through compulsion or against their will.” Addressing the problem at the Abu Fana Monastery, the governor said the issue was “a land dispute between two parties, one of which is Muslim and one of which is Christian. Everyday similar incidents take place, but between two Christian parties or two Muslim parties. Nevertheless, there is an insistence on calling everything sectarian. I see that the media is very keen to highlight the religion of each party for the reader, but I don’t know what religion adds here except sensationalism and mobilization.”

Asked why it is alleged that sectarian incidents are becoming more frequent in Minya, the governor responded, “There are many reasons. Minya has many bishoprics — nine in all. There is also the nature of the Minya citizen and his natural and religious instinct, evidenced by the fact that the call for monotheism came from here. Moreover, the population of Minya is greater than the population in governorates that hold both Muslims and Christians.” The governor added, “Some images of extremism have come from Minya —there was a curfew in place in Mallawi for ten years. The first and second defendants in the murder of President

Sadat were also from Minya. These are the reasons. The media takes the natural consequences of social circumstances and inflates them.”

38. Egyptian legislative, executive and advocacy institutions criticized the outcome of a Swiss referendum banning the construction of minarets, held on 29 November; some 57.5% of the Swiss population supported the ban. The Swiss parliament and government rejected the initiative as a violation of the Constitution and freedom of expression, religious liberties and Swiss customs of tolerance.

The Office of Sheikh al-Azhar and al-Azhar University, along with the Dar al-Ifta and the Ministry of Awqaf, issued a joint statement on 1 December condemning the ban, saying it sowed seeds of hatred and discrimination against Muslims in Switzerland and noting that some far-right forces in other European countries had called for a similar referendum on the issue. The statement added that Muslims in Switzerland had taken no action to harm their good relations with Swiss society and it stressed the need to rein in this danger to avoid any negative fallout.

Sheikh Ali Gomaa, the mufti of Egypt, told the official MENA news agency on 30 November that the referendum was not only an assault on freedom of belief, but an attempt to insult the feelings of the Islamic community both in Switzerland and abroad. He warned that this dangerous precedent might deepen hatred and discrimination against Muslims because it would affect their houses of worship with no similar restrictions imposed on any other religion and its buildings. The mufti said the measure was inconsistent with freedom of belief and conscience as guaranteed by the Swiss Constitution.

In a session held on 8 December led by Dr. Ahmed Fathi Surour, the People’s Assembly condemned the decree to ban the construction of minarets. MPs stressed the need to confront the decision “which constitutes an unjustified attack on human rights and the faith of Muslims.” They asked the Swiss government and parliament to reconsider the ban insofar as “it strongly conflicts with the principles of the Swiss state, which is founded on neutrality.” The Speaker of the People’s Assembly rejected a proposal from a joint committee comprised of members from the committees for Religious Affairs, Foreign Affairs and Human Rights to send an Egyptian parliamentary delegation to Switzerland to discuss the crisis, saying this was the mission of the Islamic Inter-Parliamentary Union and that a discussion of the decree was not relevant to the Swiss authorities since it was the result of a popular referendum. As such, he said, the only forum for a discussion of the decree was the European Court of Human Rights. In a joint meeting on 16 December, the three committees decided to form a delegation to travel to Switzerland, meet with Swiss MPs and confront the party that called for the referendum. The committees also urged Muslim and Arab businessmen to withdraw their funds from Swiss banks.



39. On 2 December 2009, the online newspaper *al-Youm al-Sab'a* reported that the Awqaf department in Alexandria, in cooperation with the ruling NDP, had allocated LE144,000 for the development and renovation of 24 mosques and churches in the governorate. The website quoted Mohamed Abu Hatab, the director of the Awqaf Department in Alexandria, as saying, "This budget comes from the NDP General Secretariat in Cairo. The department then held a meeting to examine the needs of the mosques and churches targeted by this development plan."

The website also reported that Engineer Farag Amer, a member of the Shura Council for the NDP, said, "The sum is divided in three payments of LE72,008, LE67,008 and LE5,000, for the Church of the Virgin and St. Paul in al-Hadra, the Ibad al-Rahman Mosque in New Hadra, and mosques and churches in the districts of al-Attarin, Kom al-Dikka, Muharram Bek, Ghorbal and Bab Sharq. He added that the distribution of funds was approved by the Awqaf Committee."

40. On 15 December 2009, the General Secretariat of the Islamic Research Council of al-Azhar ruled to withdraw al-Azhar's monthly magazine for the month of Dhu al-Hijja 1430 and its special supplement, titled "An Academic Report," by Dr. Mohamed Imara, a member of the council. In a statement published in several newspapers, the secretariat said that the issue was being withdrawn from the market because "some of our Coptic brethren took the contents of the supplement as an insult." The secretary-general of the council, Sheikh Ali Abd al-Baqi, reiterated to the press "the full, strong respect that the Islamic Research Council has for the Christian faith." He added that the council holds for Christians in Egypt and abroad "respect and esteem, and it was not intended at any moment to insult any of the dear children of Egypt, since Muslims and Christians in Egypt are part of one social fabric."

The free supplement by Dr. Imara, a copy of which was obtained by the EIPR, included sections referring to evidence of "the perversion of the Torah and Gospels," according to the writer, which sparked criticisms from Egyptian Christians who thought that al-Azhar's publication of the pamphlet was an insult to Christians. The most prominent public criticisms came from Dr. Safwat al-Bayadi, the head of the evangelical community, in an open letter to the Sheikh of al-Azhar. A lawyer filed a complaint with the Public Prosecutor (no. 21528/2009) against Dr. Imara on 9 December, accusing him of defaming Christianity. The prosecutor's office took the lawyer's statement, but no other action had been taken at the time this report was written.

41. In a statement released on 24 December, the Egyptian Dar al-Ifta said that 400,392 fatwas had been issued in 2009, "comprising everything of concern to the Muslim in all aspects of life." In the same period, the Dar al-Ifta also reviewed 160 death sentences issued against those convicted for various offenses, among them murder, rape and drug trafficking. According to the statement, "The mufti gave his legal opinion on some of them, but others are still pending to guarantee justice for the convicted." The statement said that Dar al-Ifta had received 2,097 written requests for fatwas, 68,879 oral requests, 248,680 phone requests and 82,736 internet requests.

## VI. Reports, Publications and Activities

42. Dr. Ali Gomaa, the mufti of Egypt, took part in a conference organized by the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University in Washington D.C. The conference, titled "A Common Word Between Us and You: A Global Agenda for Change," was held from 6 to 9 October 2009. In the opening session of the conference, one of the many advocating interfaith dialogue, according to press reports the mufti urged for the participants to "go beyond [the step of] understanding to [forming] partnerships, to open many [unexplored] avenues that could lead to new horizons and a process that could add a practical course to an intellectual, religious and theoretical dialogue,". In the conference's closing session, the mufti said, "Any Muslim who is not striving for peace does not understand Islam," citing the fact that Muslims did not alter the identity of the areas they conquered and did not force their inhabitants to speak their own language, the proof being that 80% of the Islamic world are not Arabs and do not speak Arabic. The daily newspaper *al-Shorouk* reported on 9 October that the mufti took part in another seminar at the Johns Hopkins University in Washington D.C., titled "The Challenges to Moderate Islam: the Egyptian Religious Establishment against Extremism." In the seminar, Dr. Gomaa said, "The religious establishment in Egypt has rehabilitated some 16,000 Egyptian extremists arrested after Sadat's assassination. Rehabilitation programs were set up to reduce their militancy and make them less extremist."

43. The Institute for Coptic Studies organized its first academic conference, titled "A Half Century of Coptic Studies," on Thursday, 8 October 2009. The three-day conference discussed applied research, Coptic archeological excavations, support for interest in restoring icons, raising awareness of Coptic culture and periodical publishing of writings that would familiarize people with Coptic culture. The conference closed with several recommendations, proposed by Dr. Antun Yaqoub, the dean of the institute. In the recommendations, a copy of which was obtained by the EIPR, Yaqoub stressed the importance of cooperation and contact with associations interested in Coptic studies, the need to establish a digital library and a center for the preservation of Coptic monuments, and contact with universities to encourage the establishment of departments for the study of the Coptic language.

He also spoke of the need to teach Coptic history and heritage in Egyptian schools and universities and establish departments in various colleges.

44. On 10 October 2009, 36 Egyptian rights organizations released a statement calling on President Mubarak to issue a decree for a unified law on the construction of houses of worship. The organizations stated that the law would lead to “an end to sectarian tension, stop repeated crises and confront such incidents decisively.” According to the statement, the organizations directed their appeal to President Mubarak due to “the legislator’s delay in confronting the problem and its inability to pass a law, despite the existence of several bills in various People’s Assembly committees.” The organizations believe that such a law would reaffirm the principle of citizenship.

The organizations rejected statements by Dr. Mufid Shehab, the Minister of State for Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, who said that the government is still studying the bill before submitting it to parliament. In the statement the organizations said, “Since 2005, several bills on houses of worship have been drafted and submitted to the People’s Assembly, including a bill by Judge Mohamed Geweili, the chair of the Proposals and Complaints Committee, as well as bills by MPs Kamal Ahmed, Ibtisam Habib, Georgette Qalalini and others. The National Council for Human Rights has also proposed a bill for the construction and renovation of houses of worship.”

45. Egyptians Against Religious Discrimination organized three seminars in the period under review: “The Unified Law on the Construction of Houses of Worship: Duties and Obstacles,” on 20 October 2009; “Sectarian Violence: Causes and Consequences,” on 16 November 2009; and “Is There a Need for a Conversion Law?” on 21 December 2009. In the latter, speakers said that there was less a need for a new law than a better implementation of the current law, as well as a resolution of the government requirement to list one’s religious affiliation on national identity documents.

In related news, on 27 October 2009, the group issued a statement on the sectarian violence seen in the city of Dayrut, located in Assyout governorate, on 24 October (see paragraph 11 of this report), urging “the reinstatement of regard and deference for the rule of law in all its general, abstract and compulsory precepts through the pursuit of the assailants, the arrest of the fugitive suspect and the implementation of the law for all of them.” The statement warned against “falling into the trap of the ill-reputed customary reconciliation meetings, which involve putting aside right and impartiality and seriously dealing with the illness of social violence, starting with sectarian violence.” The group also called for “the creation of a committee at the highest level composed of members of the People’s Assembly and Shura Council, political parties, civil society and advocacy groups and professors of sociology and

psychology to study the real causes of sectarian violence and how to confront it so that national interests come before narrow sectarian interests.”

46. On 26 October, the US State Department issued its annual report on international religious freedom. The chapter on Egypt confirmed that “the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government declined somewhat during the reporting period,” which the report attributed to “the failure to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of increased incidents of sectarian violence.” The report noted some positive developments, among them “actions by the courts and the Ministry of Interior that opened the door for the possibility that all of the country’s Baha’is would eventually be issued national identification documents that contain a dash or the term ‘other’ in the religious affiliation field.” The report also described as positive the Court of Cassation ruling that granted a Christian woman custody of her two sons despite their father’s conversion to Islam.

The report states that the government continues to foster reconciliation sessions after sectarian attacks, which often “obviated the prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against Copts and precluded their recourse to the judicial system for restitution.” The report states that this practice has helped create “a climate of impunity that encouraged further assaults.” The report discusses the status of non-Muslim religious minorities officially recognized by the government, saying that they are generally able to practice their rites without harassment, but some Christians and Baha’is (who are not recognized by the government) face individual and collective discrimination in many fields. The report also addressed the Egyptian government’s detention of members of minority Islamic groups, such as Qur’anists and Shi’ites.

The report noted that the Egyptian government took measures to cull the country’s pigs fearing the spread of the H1N1 virus in densely populated urban areas, adding that “some observers identified a sectarian motive for the action. The Government’s culling of the swine had a severe economic impact on Coptic Christian families who rely on pigs and garbage scavenging for their primary income.”

The report says that the Egyptian government detained and harassed several Muslim converts to Christianity, pressuring them to return to Islam: “One convert told U.S. officials that government authorities had raped her. Another convert showed U.S. officials scars from physical abuse he said he had previously suffered in detention, and he subsequently reported further abuse that he said occurred during the reporting period.” The report offered no additional details on these two cases.

The report reveals that the US ambassador in Cairo, senior US administration officials and congressmen expressed their concerns to their Egyptian counterparts regarding religious discrimination against Christians in their ability to build and maintain churches, as well as official discrimination against Baha’is and the government’s treatment of Muslim citizens who convert to another faith.

47. Citizens in One Homeland, which includes many independent Coptic intellectuals, issued its third document in October, titled "The Church of the Egyptian Nation: Future Perspective." The document analyzed church reform and managing the succession to Pope Shenouda. The group called for a national dialogue on general deficiencies related to religious entities that had become a party in politics, to establish modern strictures regulating the involvement of religious entities in public and political life, adjusted to suit Egypt's civil tradition as well as modern political development. The document also called for an internal dialogue within the church involving all members without discrimination and "regardless of political alliances," describing it as "a dialogue that takes into consideration an awareness of the needs of all elements of contemporary administration as agreed upon by others' experience, among them transparency, accountability and the rotation of power in accordance with modern bylaws and mechanisms that suit the age, as well as institutional administration and the need to deal openly with public opinion and the modern media so as not to undermine the right to knowledge and access to information."

48. The Copts of Austria Organization held its second conference, titled "Positive Solutions to Copts' Problems in Our Beloved Egypt," on 31 October 2009. The conference recommended activating the principle of citizenship as stipulated by the Constitution, to include a reappraisal of academic curricula and the removal of all expressions offensive to all religions that instill hatred in children's hearts, in order to raise children in a healthy climate far from religious extremism and hatred of others. It also recommended teaching Coptic history in history classes as part of the history of Egypt and creating a pedagogical and media culture that fosters equality, respect for others and freedom of religion.

The conference stressed the need to issue a law against discrimination and the need for a government office charged with examining complaints of religious discrimination related to hiring, promotion or other job related issues. The conference urged the passage of a unified law for the construction of houses of worship and a law that would regulate freedom of religion and the freedom to convert to any religion, as well as consideration for Christian representation in the coming parliamentary elections, whether through a list system, affirmative action, a quota or any other means that would achieve adequate representation of Copts. The conference urged religious institutions not to stand in the way of creative freedom, as well as calling for a renewal of the religious discourse, accountability for extremist ideas that lead to strife and the monitoring of religious publications.

49. A group interested in Coptic issues held the fourth conference for secular Copts on 21 November 2009. The recommendations and conference papers, copies of which were obtained by the EIPR, included demands for a higher church council "to

provide the institutional capacity to protect the church from the personal whims and passions of its leaders." It also demanded that "the church not involve itself in politics and that bishops not be nominated for the position of the Pope, for it creates regrettable conflicts between bishops, in violation of church teachings." Participants recommended changing the term "ecclesiastic tribunals" to "ecclesiastic discipline," as well as changing the name of the Confessional Council, an obsolete "sectarian appellation" according to conference participants, to the Secular Council.

50. An opinion poll that surveyed 18,487 people in 20 countries found that 71% of Egyptians support a ban on the defamation of religion and believe that governments should have the right to fine or imprison people who publicly defame religion. The American World Public Opinion group released the findings of the poll on 23 November 2009, conducted in cooperation with the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland. The survey found that only 29% of Egyptians support allowing criticism of religion as a form of freedom of expression. The poll found that most people around the world support a person's right to criticize religion. In total, 13 of 20 countries, or 57%, support allowing criticism of religion in the media as a form of freedom of opinion, compared to 34% who oppose it. Most of the people urging a ban on criticism of religion were Muslim or populations in which Muslims are highly represented. Pakistan came in second after Egypt in support of the ban, followed by India, Iraq, Nigeria, Palestine and Indonesia. Countries polled include the US, Indonesia, Nigeria, Russia, Mexico, Chile, Germany, Britain, France, Poland, Ukraine, Kenya, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, Palestine, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. The poll was conducted from 25 April to 9 July 2009.

51. The National Council for Human Rights organized its second conference on citizenship on 20 and 21 December 2009 amid low attendance and limited participation from state institutions, officials and Egyptians abroad. The conference, attended by the EIPR, included an opening session in addition to four sessions that dealt with equality and equal opportunity, combating poverty and activating economic and social rights, and citizenship and migrant workers and expatriates, in addition to an open discussion session.

The final statement of the conference highlighted obstacles to an activation of citizenship, including delay to the implementation of most of the recommendations of the Declaration of Citizenship Rights from 2007, particularly the recommendation that the People's Assembly and Shura Council examine the declaration, give an opinion on it and discuss how to activate it. Others include establishing open, transparent systems for achieving merit-based equal opportunity in public employment and the need for a unified law on the construction of houses of worship. The conference also stressed the need to apply the principles of justice without discrimination before using channels for customary reconciliation and the drafting of a hate crime law that does not conflict with freedom of expression.

52. The Liberties Committee of the Journalists Syndicate convened a press conference on 22 December to express solidarity with Islamic thinker Dr. Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, who was banned entry into Kuwait by the Kuwaiti authorities. Abu Zeid received an invitation from Dr. Ahmed al-Baghdadi, the chair of the Cultural Dialogue Center in Kuwait, to give a lecture, but on 15 December an official at the Kuwait airport said that Abu Zeid was prohibited from entering the country, although he had already obtained an entry visa. Abu Zeid attributed the move to pressure from extremist Islamists in Kuwait because of his ideas and opinions.

The press conference was held in the syndicate lobby after syndicate security officials objected to it being held in the conference room, on the grounds that permission had not been obtained from the head of the syndicate, who was out of the country at the time. Those present declared the beginning of a solidarity campaign with Abu Zeid and asked the Kuwaiti government to apologize. Several intellectuals, researchers and some human rights organizations issued a statement condemning “the Kuwaiti authorities’ submission to advocates of *takfir* [branding other Muslims infidels], bigotry and closed-mindedness.”