



Egyptian Initiative  
for Personal Rights



# A Death Foretold

An analysis of the targeted killing  
and forced displacement of Arish Coptic Christians

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### **Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights**

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\*The title of this report is inspired by Colombian Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez's novel Chronicle of a Death Foretold (1981)

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## Introduction

Chronicle of a Death Foretold is the title of a novel by Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez, who is known for style of magical realism. The novel tells the story of two brothers driven to commit a murder to avenge their family honour.

Over 24 hours, the brothers spread the word of their intention to kill around their village in the hope that one of the villagers will warn the victim and lift the burden of committing the crime off their shoulders. But no one informs the man, either out of disregard for the brothers' intent, out of fear of them, or simply because no one felt it was their concern. The inevitable result, known to all in advance, is that the two brothers kill the poor victim in his home, with everyone watching.

In February, Egypt was the site of events similar to "Chronicle of a Death Foretold," but with killers and victims of flesh and blood rather than characters in a world of magical realism. The killers in this case did not spare any effort to declare their intention, doing so not only over one day, but over months and years. Nobody cared about that declaration, whether out of disregard, fear, failure, or a conviction that the matter did not concern them. The inevitable result on the ground, as in the novel, was that the killers carried out their threats in broad daylight and in the presence of everyone.

This report documents various ways in which North Sinai Governorate's Coptic have been targeted. The report covers the past six years until the end of February 2017 and documents intimidating ranging from preventing the practice of religious rites, burning churches, attacking property, kidnap-for-ransom, to forced displacement and identity killings. This report attempts to put the most recent events in a broader context. Considering growing sectarian violence in its various forms; the increasing influence of extremist armed Islamist groups in North Sinai; and the failure to provide the necessary protection mandated by the 2014 Constitution, relevant laws, and international human rights norms, this report describes how Copts are facing direct threats despite available means of protection within the state apparatus.

*Documentation of these facts produces three main conclusions:*

- Based on Egyptian legal and constitutional principles, as well as the international human rights standards that Egypt has voluntarily adopted, what happened in February cannot be described except as the forced displacement of a religiously homogeneous group by armed or semi-armed groups who intended to members of this group from their homes. It cannot be underestimated, nor can it be considered a voluntary departure or a mass exodus to escape an armed conflict.
- The practice of forced displacement is not an exceptional event in Egypt's prevailing climate of sectarian tension. Security services tolerate this common practice, often colluding with the perpetrators to extend its scope further. This collusion occurs through officials' approval or through supervising the customary reconciliation sessions held to settle most sectarian disputes, and in which displacement is a salient component of decisions.

- State security and local authorities' management of the crisis has failed to meet their constitutional, legal and international obligations to protect the basic rights of Egyptian citizens in North to life, property and non-forced displacement. This failure is especially powerful given the heavy deployment of security and military in the region and the long timespan over which these events occurred. This should have allowed officials to anticipate and plan effective intervention and protection.

The report was based on a number of field visits conducted by EIPR's researchers to the city of Ismailia. During these visits, researchers collected numerous and diverse testimonies from the displaced, their families, and some religious and government officials. It is also based on historical quantitative and qualitative research on incidents of sectarian violence conducted by EIPR over the past six years. The findings of this research were published in a number of recent reports and studies.

The report is divided into five main sections, plus its recommendations and annexes.

**The first section** presents a historical background on the development of sectarian violence in Egypt since 25 January 2011. It documents the main patterns of this violence while focusing on the role of customary reconciliation sessions, and related practices of displacement, as an illegal mechanism for resolving such conflicts.

**The second section** discusses the security, political and social situation in North Sinai, which helps describe the security developments during the same period: confrontations between the state and a number of armed radical groups. The section examines the repercussions of this security situation on the lives of Copts in the region.

**The third section** includes an analysis of the killings and forced displacement that took place in February.

**Section four** reviews the main security, local, and executive authorities positions.

Finally, section five provides an overview of the most important violations committed against the Copts of North Sinai during the crisis.

The report concludes with a number of urgent recommendations aimed at securing displaced Coptic families, protecting their properties, and enabling them to return to their homes, as well as regarding the prosecution of perpetrators, fair trial rights, and other basic citizens rights.

The report also includes four annexes. The first explains the report's methodology in collecting and documenting testimonies. The second includes a summary of all cases of displacement documented in the report. The third includes the testimonies of the displaced and their families as collected by EIPR researchers. And the fourth provides an overview of the evolution of armed groups in Sinai, including the development of their objectives and tactics.

We offer this report to all legislative and executive bodies; to all civil society organizations, whether human rights organizations, relief organizations or charity organizations; and to various media professionals. By addressing these events in their historical context of deep rooted sectarianism, discriminatory practices, economic and social marginalization, and the absence of public freedoms, this report aims to assist the above parties and contribute to a reflection on effective solutions to ensure these crimes are not repeated in the future.

## General Background on Sectarian Attacks

It is impossible to understand the events that took place in the city of Arish in isolation from incidents of sectarian violence elsewhere in Egypt and the treatment of those incidents by official and community bodies. There has been a rise in the rate of attacks against Christians in various regions in recent years. Although governments and officials have changed several times since the January 2011 revolution, their treatment of the issue has remained more or less the same, showing little care for addressing the roots of sectarian violence, nor for the crises that result from violating Christian citizens' rights. Those bodies frequently resorted to extra-legal measures to reduce the acute nature of sectarian tension, or they added superficial and meaningless improvements to the legislative structure related to citizenship rights.

Though types of sectarian violence vary, they can be divided into several main patterns:

### *Deliberate targeted killings of Christians because of their religious beliefs:*

These Attacks are not carried out against a backdrop of social, economic or political crises between the perpetrators and their victims. Rather the targeting is based solely on religious identity. During the 1980s and 1990s, armed Islamist groups carried out sectarian attacks of this pattern in Egypt. Later, this pattern decreased, especially after the Islamist groups carried out so-called intellectual revisions and security authorities tightened its grip in Upper Egypt. However, this latency period ended with the incident in the Qena Governorate city of Naja Hammadi, when, on the night of January 6, 2010, worshippers were attacked as they were leaving church after the Coptic Christmas mass. Six Christians and a Muslim who was accompanying them were killed, while nine Christians were injured.<sup>1</sup>

In the early hours of the morning on January 1, 2011, Alexandria's Saint Mark and Pope Peter Church was attacked. About 24 Christians died. Investigations into the incident remain vague. Former Interior Minister Habib al-Adly attributed responsibility for the attack to a Palestinian Islamist organization, but the ministry refrained from submitting its investigations to the prosecution in charge of the case.<sup>2</sup> On 11 December, 2016, St. Peter and St. Paul Church in Cairo was bombed, resulting in the death of 28 Christians. While speaking at the military funeral for the victims, President of the Republic Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced the name of the suicide bomber who blew himself up at the church. The Islamist group Province of Sinai, which declared its allegiance to the Islamic State, then claimed responsibility by stating its suicide bomber had attacked the church.<sup>3</sup>

1- Naga Hammadi: Witnesses to the Strife. EIPR, 2010. <http://bit.ly/2pTrjS2>

2- Al Masry Alyoum: Administrative court orders Ministry of Interior to submit its investigations in the incident of Saints' church to the prosecution, 8 September 2016. <http://bit.ly/2qoXxUZ>

3- Al Youm El Sebe'e, Isis declares responsibility for the bombing of St. Peter's church and confesses: the perpetrator wore an explosive belt, 13 December 2016. <http://bit.ly/2p4Mz33>



*Prohibited prayer:*

Prohibiting the practice of Coptic rites is one of the main causes of sectarian attacks. It is also a violation of one of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. A wide swathe of citizens and state organs are implicated in these violations, which find legal support in the extremely complex requirements governing the construction of churches and affiliated buildings and services. That matter was governed by the 1856 Hamayouni decree, also known as the 1934 Azabi Pasha terms<sup>4</sup>, and while a new law governing church construction was promulgated in 2016, it legitimized the above-mentioned conditions.<sup>5</sup>

*Emotional or sexual relations between people of different religions:*

Christian-Muslim emotional and sexual relations have resulted in many incidents of sectarian violence. The established pattern is that Christians are dealt with as a «tribe,» where all members are held responsible for the error of any single individual, even if he or she is not related to the people concerned. Along the same lines, all Muslims become responsible for the honour of a Muslim girl or woman. Usually the incidents begin with a consensual relation between two people, one of whom is a Muslim and the other a Christian. However, the situation is rapidly presented as an assault by the followers of one religion on the followers of the other.<sup>6</sup>

*Expressing opinions on religious matters:*

Here, there are two types of practices that lead to sectarian violence. The first is related to what are known as «contempt of religion» cases, which have increased unprecedentedly in recent years and are usually accompanied by attacks on Copts' properties.<sup>7</sup> The second type concerns citizens who have voluntarily changed their religion, resulting in sectarian strife and attacks.

*Civil strife:*

Civil strife usually begins as an ordinary quarrel or dispute over land ownership, but, for many reasons, turns into a sectarian conflict, where each party is joined by supporters, resulting in attacks, collective punishment, and violations of the law.

*Political violence:*

Some political actors, especially during elections, become involved in directly inciting sectarian tensions, contributing to the escalation of tension into sectarian conflict. This pattern increased after the 25 January 2011 revolution, with the growing role of Islamist groups and parties, some of which were implicated in promoting religious polarization against a backdrop of political issues.

*Abusing Copts' vulnerability:*

This pattern is associated with several incidents that took place after 25 January 2011. These incidents took place in a climate of weakened state security presence in many parts of the country,

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4- In reference to the Hamayoni Decree issued in 1856 during Ottoman rule requiring all church building, maintenance, and renovation have to take place via a presidential decree. Further conditions were added by Mohammed al-Azabi Pasha, Deputy of the Ministry of Interior who outlined ten conditions for building churches in February 1934 (translator's note)

5- Closed for security reasons: Tensions and sectarian attacks due to the construction and restoration of churches, EIPR, November 2016. <http://bit.ly/2qAhgxn>

6- Two Years of Sectarian Violence: What happened? Where do we begin? An Analytical Study of Jan 2008 -Jan 2010. EIPR, April 2010. <http://bit.ly/2qu8B0w>

7- Besieging Freedom of Thought: Defamation of Religion Cases in Two Years of the Revolution. EIPR, September 2013. <http://bit.ly/2pTZk4T>

which produced a failure to ensure the safety of Coptic citizens and their property. For example, kidnappings of Copts for ransom increased after January 2011. Although it has not been proven that the motives were religious, or that the perpetrators were organizationally affiliated to well-known Islamist movements or groups, it is clear that Copts' vulnerability and the security apparatus's reluctance to intervene contributes to the recurrence of such attacks.<sup>8</sup>

It is noteworthy that in most incidents of sectarian violence, for any of the above-mentioned reasons, Christians' economic interests are targeted. Although Egyptian law considers burning houses and property a criminal act whose penalty may amount to life imprisonment, we claim that burning houses as sectarian violence has become common. Its repetition amounts to a routine event carried out by aggressors who have minimum regard for the law and its deterrent provisions.

The treatment for significant numbers of sectarian attacks, particularly in Upper Egypt, is what are called customary reconciliation sessions. This practice is criticized and opposed by large sections of the Coptic community. They perceive it as a way of avoiding applying the law that spares perpetrators from facing criminal trial and further precipitates various forms of religious discrimination.<sup>9</sup>

From the 25 January 2011 revolution until August 2016, EIPR has monitored and documented about 64 cases of sectarian attacks whose consequences were addressed in customary reconciliation sessions. This number does not represent the total number of sectarian attacks and incidents in Egypt during this period, nor, of course, does it represent all the incidents that were settled by customary reconciliation sessions. Nonetheless, it is a revealing sample.

One of the most prominent outcomes of these sessions is so-called displacement. This temporary and unjust resolution of sectarian tension further exacerbates violations of Egyptian law. Deportation orders are not limited to the person involved in the conflict but are issued to whole families for reasons that may not address the initial cause of the tension. For example, under the terms of such agreements, citizens must leave their homes and properties as well as the village, province, or region in which they had lived and established social and economic relations. In some cases, a committee is appointed to manage and dispose of the property of displaced families. This practice has been carried out with the full knowledge of government officials who, at times, sponsored the agreements. These agreements constitute an evasion of the state's obligations to protect citizens from forced evictions and provide them with legal protection in accordance with Article 16 of Comment No. 7 in the elaboration of Article 11 (1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>10</sup> on forced evictions.

It's enough to know that the customary reconciliation committee in the Alexandrian village of Sharbat at 'Amriya Center at the end of 2011 was held at the Amiriyah police investigation headquarters in the presence of Colonel Khaled Shalabi, the head of the Criminal Investigation Unit in Alexandria; pastors Boqtor Nashed and Absachron Soliman; and seven representatives of Muslim families in the village. The Muslim side, with the blessing of security leaders, announced the displacement of eight Christian families from the village under the pretext of «calming the congested Muslim street.» Representatives of the Muslim side also announced that a committee, which they

8- Kidnapping and imposing tribute on the Copts of Upper Egypt. Ishaq Ibrahim. Mada Masr. 10 March 2014. <http://bit.ly/2pExZma>

9- "Whose Customs? The Role of Customary Reconciliation in Sectarian Disputes and State Responsibility", EIPR, 11 June 2015 <http://bit.ly/2pTEZMQ>

10- Comment no.7, 1977 <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/ForcedEvictions.aspx>

will form, would sell the displaced family's property within three months. It also dictated that the displaced families should not return to the village, not even to meet with buyers. Later, human rights and political organizations lobbied for the return of displaced families. Another customary reconciliation session was held, under the patronage of then-MPs, which approved the return of four families and the permanent displacement of three others.<sup>11</sup>

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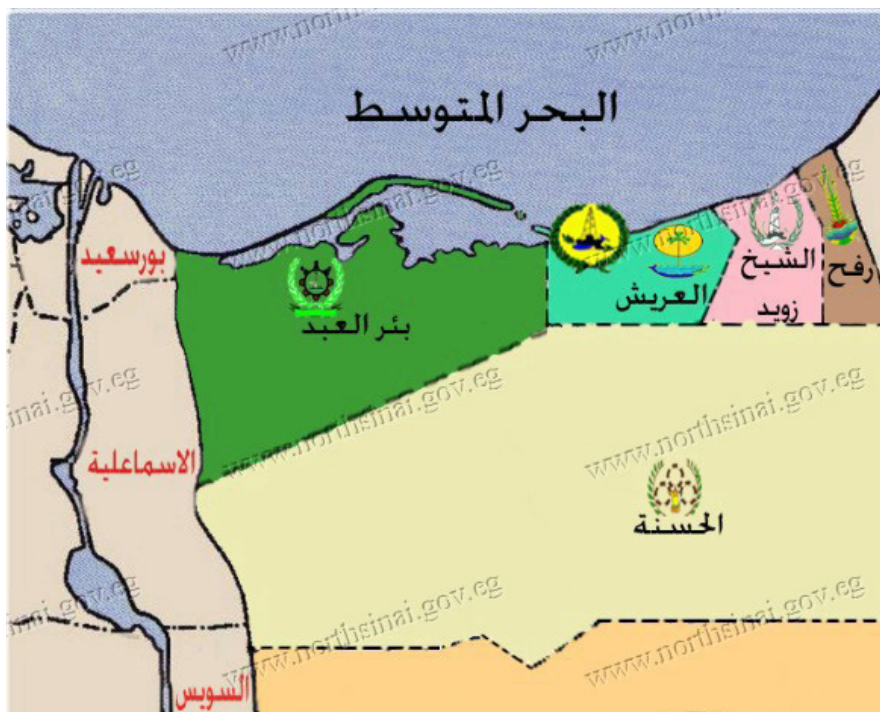
11- Crimes in Al-Amiriya: Collective Punishment of Copts and Official Sanction for Sectarian Attacks. EIPR, 12 February 2012. <http://bit.ly/2p1NW1y>

## Background on the Legal and Social Context of North Sinai and its Particulars

For more than six years, since the outbreak of the January 2011 revolution, North Sinai has served as the stage for several events and developments pertaining to the state's security forces. These include, most notably, the surge in targeting of police forces and members of the Egyptian Armed Forces and their posts after the ouster of former President Mohamed Morsi on July 3, 2013.

The Ansar Beit al-Maqdes group, which re-named itself the Province of Sinai after declaring allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in November 2014, claimed responsibility for most of those attacks.

It is important to note that most of these operations did not extend across the North Sinai Governorate, which consists of six administrative centers. In addition to the capital city of Arish, there are the Sheikh Zuwayed and Rafah to its east, and Bir al-Abd to its west, as well as Al-Hasna and Nakhl in its south. Armed operations were mainly confined to the cities of Rafah and Sheikh Zuwayed. In 2015, they spread quickly to the city of Arish. They then expanded further south, with some operations reaching Al-Hasna and the south of Bir al-Abd in 2016.



Administrative map of North Sinai. Source: Official governorate website

The armed targeting of army and police forces in North Sinai began on August 5, 2012. The incident is known in the media as the Rafah massacre. 16 enlisted personnel and an officer from the Armed Forces were killed, while seven others were injured.<sup>12</sup> The incident occurred during the first weeks of Morsi's rule. In the aftermath of the attack, the new president declared a three-day state of national mourning (Presidential Decree No. 97 of 2012).

At the time, Morsi introduced several unprecedented changes. He dismissed Field Marshal Mohamed Tantawi and General Sami Annan and appointed Major General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as defence minister, a move that promoted Sisi to the rank of field marshal. Following the Rafah incident, Morsi met with senior Armed Forces officials and representatives from the Interior Ministry and General Intelligence and announced that «orders were issued to mobilize all forces to arrest the perpetrators,» stressing that «forces will impose full control over these areas. Sinai is safe and fully under control, and those [perpetrators] will pay a dire price, as will all who cooperate with them in this place or elsewhere.»<sup>13</sup> Morsi added that the state's response would be implemented the day after his speech.

Accordingly, the Armed Forces began "Operation Sinai Eagle" in Sinai on 7 August 2012, with the stated aim of eliminating «criminal and terrorist groups" and achieving «security and stability, enforcing state sovereignty, and upholding the rule of law in Sinai.» The operation was announced as an ongoing campaign. At a news conference on 15 September 2013, military spokesperson Colonel Ahmed Mohammed Ali said the expansion of military raids after July 2013 were a new phase of the military operation that had begun in August 2012 and was still ongoing at the time.<sup>14</sup> From this, it can be deduced that the military campaign begun on 7 August 2012 was not over in September, having instead undergone various iterations and taken on different names.

According to a statement by a former military spokesperson, "terrorist operations" against law enforcement officers doubled after Morsi was removed from office on July 3, 2013. The number of Armed Forces and police personnel killed in the region through 15 September 2013 exceeded the total death toll since the beginning of 2011. The number of dead increased to the extent that armed militants' killing of soldiers and officers, whether by bombing or sniper fire, became an almost-daily piece of news. However, there is no official data on the total number of deaths among the Armed Forces, police or civilians over the past few years.

The scope of armed targeting has expanded. Originally restricted to security forces, including the Armed Forces, intelligence and Ministry of Interior, targeted attacks expanded to include judges and counselors in two incidents in Arish. The first incident occurred on 16 May 2015, when gunmen opened fire on a car carrying four judges, a prosecutor, and the vehicle's driver. Three of the judges and the driver were killed in the attack; others were injured. The second incident took place on 24 November 2015, at a hotel where judges overseeing parliamentary elections in Arish were staying. Judge Omar Mohamed Gad and two members of the police were killed in the inci-

12- 7 August 2012: Al-Masry Al-Youm: Details of the Rafah Massacre. Masked men attack the checkpoint with 4 vehicles. The breakfast cannon indicated the moment of execution. <http://bit.ly/2pBRcCZ>

13- YouTube video titled «Speech by president Mohamed Morsi regarding the Rafah incidents. 5 August 2012. <http://bit.ly/2qoNHTg>

14- YouTube video titled «Military spokesperson gives press conference regarding latest developments in Sinai. <http://bit.ly/2p1RDVk>

dent, while 12 people – a mix of civilians and police and Armed Forces members – were injured.<sup>15</sup>

In various statements, the Province of Sinai announced that its members had killed dozens of civilians and claimed they were «agents for the Egyptian and Zionist armies.» The rate of their targeted attacks on civilians increased during 2015 and 2016 on grounds of the same claim.

## The legal Situation Governing North Sinai: From military commander decrees to the imposition of a state of emergency

On 24 October 2014, in the aftermath of an armed attack on the Karm al-Qawadis checkpoint, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi issued Presidential Decree No. 366 of 2014. The decree imposed a state of emergency and curfew on areas of North Sinai (from the area east of Rafah hill, across the international border line, until Al-Awja, extending westward from the west of Arish to Gabal al-Halal, northward from the west of Arish along the coast to the international border in Rafah, and southward from Gabal al-Halal to Al-Awja on the international border). The curfew went into effect on 25 October 2014 at 5 pm, running to 7 am the next day, and extended over a period of three months. Since then, the state of emergency has been reinstated a few days before the end of each three-month period.

Article 3 of the decree states, «the Armed Forces and police forces shall take the necessary measures to confront the dangers of terrorism and its financing, to maintain security in the region, protect public and private property and the lives of citizens.» Article 4 of the decree states that, «Any person who contravenes the orders by the President of the Republic will be subject for punishment by the provisions of Law No. 162 of 1958.»

Then former Prime Minister Ibrahim Mehleb issued ministerial decree No. 2232 of 2015. This amended the curfew to run from 7 pm to 6 am and also limited Arish's curfew to four hours instead of 11, running from 1 am to 5 am daily.<sup>16</sup>

The amendment was to apply to all decrees imposing or extending subsequent states of emergency, the latest of which was Presidential Decree No. 56 of 2017 which extended the state of emergency in the region for a period of three months beginning 30 January 2017.

The preamble to each decree states that the state of emergency was imposed after consultation with the Cabinet, as per the stipulations of Article 154 of the Constitution concerning the powers of the President of the Republic to declare a state of emergency:

*«After consultation with the Cabinet, the President of the Republic may declare a state of emergency as regulated by Law. Such a declaration must be presented to the House of Representatives within the following seven days to decide thereon as it deems fit. If the declaration takes place while the House of Representatives is not in regular session, the House must be invited to convene immediately in order to consider such a declaration. In all cases, the declaration of the state of emergency must be approved by a majority of the members of the House of Representatives. The state of emergency shall be declared for a specified period not exceeding three months, which may only be extended for another similar period*

15- BBC Arabic: Four killed, including two judges, upon the targeting of their hotel in North Sinai, 24 November 2015. <http://bbc.in/1NNyawN>

16- Prime Minister Decree no. 2232/2015, Official Gazette, vol. no. 33 (a), 13 August, 2015

*after obtaining the approval of two-thirds of House members. In case the House of Representatives has not been elected, the matter shall be referred to the Cabinet for approval provided, however, that it is presented to the new House of Representatives at its first session. The House of Representatives may not be dissolved while the state of emergency is in force.» (Article 154 of the Constitution of Egypt is in force and amended according to the referendum of 14 January 2014).*

Five special emergency decrees were issued in Sinai without Parliament, which was elected and held its first session on 10 January 2016, after an absence of three years. The following decrees were delayed in their consideration by Parliament, as well as Presidential Decree No. 187 of 2016, which declared a state of emergency in areas of North Sinai from 29 April 2016 and which Parliament approved one month later on 24 May 2016. It was approved by 340 members and rejected by 6.

It is also worth noting that most of the members of Parliament representing the Sinai Peninsula – whether in the north or south – tended to vote against renewing the almost continuous state of emergency in areas of North Sinai. They emphasized that the state of emergency is essentially a cause of suffering for people and asserted that it is an ineffective tool in the fight against terrorism. According to MP Ghazi Saad, a member of the House of Representatives representing North Sinai, «Continuing the state of emergency in Sinai harms security personnel more than the citizens of Sinai. Terrorists are taking advantage of the emergency situation and the subsequent curfews to plant and remove explosives so that, by the morning, we find 20 more soldiers have been martyred.»<sup>17</sup>

MP Hossam al-Rifai, a representative from the Arish district in North Sinai, said that he «did not agree to the declaration of a state of emergency in areas in the North Sinai Governorate, and yet the report of the general committee of Parliament stated his approval with some reservations.»<sup>18</sup>

## General Overview of the Security Presence in North Sinai:

Although more than four years have passed since the announcement of the official campaign against terrorist groups in areas of North Sinai, there has been no transparent public disclosure of the numbers of troops stationed there, nor of the excessive costs required by such military campaigns. President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi issued the only statement regarding this information during a telephone call to a satellite channel on 9 January 2017. He announced that «there are 41 army battalions of 25,000 fighters in Sinai, in addition to their ammunition and logistical expenses. This is but one aspect of the extent of the resources mobilized for the confrontation.»<sup>19</sup>

In accordance with Law No. 136 of 2014, issued by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Armed Forces and the police were to share the responsibility of securing public and vital facilities, not only in Sinai, but throughout the country for a period of two years. The time-frame was extended in 2016 for another five years, placing more responsibility for maintaining internal security on the army battalions Sisi mentioned in his telephone conversation.

17- Youm7: After a «hot» session, the House of Representatives approves the declaration of an extension of the emergency state in some areas of North Sinai ... Sinai Deputies express reservations on security measures ... And demand a reduction in the duration of the curfew ... And Osama Sharshar: Necessities permit the prohibited. May 24 2016. <http://bit.ly/2p21fPA>

18- Ibid.

19- Masrawy website: Video, Full interview of President El Sisi with Amr Adib, 9 January 2017. <http://bit.ly/2p1Y62v>

The extent of the troop deployment differs from the security presence in the concerned areas before the Egyptian revolution on January 25, 2011. By virtue of the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and its annexes, Egyptian Armed Forces were not allowed to be deployed in the Sinai peninsula. The region was secured by police forces and the Multinational Force and Observers on the condition that Egyptian police carry light arms to perform normal police functions within an area marked by the greatest military vacuum in Sinai representing a little less than a quarter of the peninsula and the entire border between Egypt and occupied Palestine.»<sup>20</sup>

According to the testimonies of Sheikh Zuwayed and Rafah residents, they had never seen a single Egyptian Armed Forces soldier in the areas before the revolution. Some testimonies indicated that Armed Forces tanks and armoured vehicles were welcomed by large groups of citizens with the deployment of the former after the incidents of 28 January 2011 and the subsequent withdrawal of large civilian police units.

Prior to January 2011, the situation was characterized by the usual security presence of one police station for each of the six centers of North Sinai Governorate, with the exception of Arish, which has four police stations, of which only three are currently operational (Arish 1, 2 and 3). Arish police station 4 does not operate, according to the testimonies by residents, after it was burned down during the revolution. Additionally, there are the North Sinai Directorate of Security and the headquarters of border guards Battalion 101, as well as the Central Security Forces camp in Al-Ahraash area, north of Rafah, and the Military Intelligence office in Rafah.

None of the security headquarters has been spared from armed attacks over the past three years. The heaviest and largest attacks took place in the city of Arish on 29 January 2015, when there were bombings and simultaneous attacks on the headquarters of Battalion 101 – which became the headquarters of deployed forces in Arish, Sheikh Zuwayed and Rafah – in addition to many focal points and security checkpoints, leaving more than 30 Armed Forces members dead.

Despite the existing strong fortification of Battalion 101 headquarters, located near the governorate building and other major government facilities in the center of Arish, these fortifications have been reinforced, according to press statements by security sources. A new curved concrete fence was built around the headquarters, extending out for close to 1,800 meters along the front of the battalion on the road connecting the North Sinai government building and Arish airport and facing the residential area of the Raed al-Arabi district and the Salam neighborhood. The sources estimated that «the cost of the new fortifications amounted to 6 million EGP from the military treasury, despite the existence of a three-meter-high concrete fence, which was modified after the recent attacks.»<sup>21</sup>

A year later, on the anniversary of the attacks on Battalion 101, the commander of the border guard battalion, Colonel Ahmed Ahmed Abdul Nabi Atwa, was killed by an explosive device while driving an armoured vehicle in Arish on 27 January 2016. Three recruits were also killed and 13 recruits were injured.<sup>22</sup>

The examples above illustrate how the large Armed Forces concentration in Arish, the capital of

20- Al-Masry Al-Youm, Sinai Camp David, a peninsula of vacuum. <http://bit.ly/2qA8U95>

21- Al-Akhbar Lebanese newspaper, Egypt: The army fortifies Battalion 101 amidst fear of a «major operation». 25 June 2015. <http://bit.ly/2p58Mhm>

22- Al-Masry Al-Youm, Funeral of commander of border guard Battalion 101 in Khanka (pictures). 28 January 2016. <http://bit.ly/2p4QtZR>



North Sinai, has been subjected to several major attacks during recent years. These attacks spared neither recruits, nor senior military officers, such as the commander of Battalion 101. This uptick was followed by the announcement of the Province of Sinai of a threat to Christians. At the same time, they increased the pace of attacks and their expansion beyond Sheikh Zuwayed and Rafah to Arish as well as Cairo, according to the so-called Islamic State - Egypt, which claimed responsibility for the bombing of St. Peter's church in Abbasseya.

## Christian Presence in North Sinai

Before the 25 January revolution, the Christian presence in North Sinai was concentrated mainly in the city of Arish, with a lesser presence in the cities of Rafah, Sheikh Zuwayed and Bir al-Abd. Many Coptic families left their original governorates to live in North Sinai in the 1970s and early 1980s, either to take on government jobs in the state bureaucracy or to engage in free trade and business occupations. There are nonetheless a limited number of Christian families who have lived in Arish since the beginning of the twentieth century, continuing to reside in the city even during Israeli occupation. There are generations of Copts that were born and died in Arish and never lived elsewhere.

There are no accurate statistics regarding the number of Christians living in the cities of North Sinai before the January 2011 revolution. However, according to church officials' estimates, there were 450 Coptic families in Arish, in addition to 20 families in Rafah, four families in Sheikh Zuwayed, about 40 families in the center of Bir al-Abd, and a small number of employees residing in Al-Hasna and Nakhl.<sup>23</sup>

There are six Coptic Orthodox churches in the North Sinai Governorate: the Holy Family Church in Rafah, which was destroyed during the revolution and remains deserted; the Church of the Virgin Mary in Dahya; the St. George Church on 23rd of July street in Arish's city center, which was the first church built in the city during the 1920s; St. Mina and Pope Kyrillos Church in the Masaid district of Arish; the Church of the Virgin and Abu Seifin in the neighbourhood of Safa; and the Martyr Abanoub Church in the center of Bir al-Abd. There are no churches for any other Christian sects. The Coptic Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem historically was responsible for North Sinai's churches. However, that mode of governance stopped in 1996, when the late Pope Shenouda III appointed Bishop Makari as the bishop of Sinai. After Makari's death in 2010, Sinai was divided into two Coptic dioceses, one in South Sinai and the other in North Sinai, the latter of which is currently presided over by Bishop Anba Qazman, who resides at the bishop's headquarters in the Church of the Virgin Mary in Dahya.

The Christians of North Sinai were allocated one burial place in 2005 in the area of «Lahfan», located south of Arish, but it has not been used for several years due to its position in an area overwhelmed by sandy dunes, in addition to security measures, which have made the place difficult to access. In recent years, Christians have buried their dead in their original governorates or in the Suez Governorate. The church has petitioned the governor of North Sinai to provide a new burial place in the vicinity of Bir al-Abd.

The tribal and clan governance and social structure in North Sinai have cast their shadow over relations between tribal residents, Muslims from the Nile Valley, and Christians. In general, relations

<sup>23</sup>- Several phone conversations with North Sinai church officials

between North Sinai's Christians and Muslims were calm and not dominated by sectarian tensions and direct sectarian violence, which is frequently the case in the governorates of Upper Egypt. The reason for this, as many testimonies have pointed out, is Copts' recognition of the nature of North Sinai society and the values under which they live, which allowed them a limited role, usually determined by tribal leaders. For example, Copts are allowed types of work and restricted movement that is not that of a leading role akin to that of tribal leaders.

Within this state of control, the majority of Coptic citizens have been satisfied with economic self-actualization and limited career promotions at the exclusion of securing a political role. However, this pattern allowed also for a space of religious discrimination that clearly dominated the daily interactions between citizens, including Muslims demanding that some women wear headscarves, refusing to hire Christian workers, or calling Christians infidels as they walked through the streets.

As a result of this tribal nature, and in conjunction with the conditions of economic crisis, a sector of the population adopted a hostile or provocative attitude toward other groups perceived as migrants – including Copts – who were sharing the already scarce resources. In this environment, Copts appear to be the weakest link in the social structure, especially as ties of a common religion provide some kind of protection for Muslim migrants. It is therefore not possible to separate the sectarian and tribal dimensions in North Sinai. The Copts in the area are not members of the Sinai tribes or tribes that could protect and represent them. They also lack the ideological alternative to tribal affiliation, which is available to their Muslim counterparts from the Nile Valley, who may seek protection from the various religious groups.

## **Patterns of targeted attacks on Copts of North Sinai after the 25 January 2011 revolution**

After the 25 January 2011 revolution, the relationship between the Muslims and Christians of North Sinai underwent a number of changes. The public appearance of a number of radical Islamist organizations and groups and their attempts to play various political roles have led to overtly sectarian practices, including targeted attacks on the basis of religious identity. The rate of these practices increased following Morsi's ouster in July 2013. The map of Christians' presence in North Sinai began to change in 2012 with several limited waves of migration spurred by targeted attacks on Copts that included killing, kidnapping for ransom, and threatening and intimidating through the distribution of leaflets. In the face of these developments, many felt left with the choice of either leaving the area or staying and being killed. Christians were easy targets for armed groups and were not as politically costly as far as tribal politics were concerned.<sup>24</sup>

### **The period under the Superior Council of Armed Forces' (SCAF) rule: Attacks on churches**

While protesters raised signs bearing slogans and chanted for national unity and good Muslim-Christian relations during the first days of the revolution in Tahrir Square, two attacks were launched on two churches in North Sinai. The first incident took place on 29 January 2011 and continued for the following few days. Groups of masked people carrying automatic weapons looted and torched the Church of St. George Church in Rafah, according to eyewitnesses. They destroyed the spotlights and the glass windows of the church, and then they broke into the church, destroyed the cross at the top of the dome, stole wooden church pews and interior doors. Despite the periods of stability in the city over the six years since the attack, the church was never used again, nor was it rebuilt and reconstructed.<sup>25</sup>

The second incident took place on 12 February 2011, when a hostel affiliated with the church was attacked in Arish's Masaid neighbourhood. Electrical appliances, furniture and furnishing were stolen, after the attack on the Arish II and III police stations and the Mubarak Library.

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24- In preparing this report, EIPR relied on the results of its documentation of sectarian tensions and attacks, as well as field visits and interviews conducted by researchers with officials and eyewitnesses in the governorates of North Sinai, Ismailia and Cairo, as well as dozens of interviews to complete information regarding the facts contained in the report.

25- The Copts under military rule. EIPR, 9 October 2012. <http://bit.ly/2p23geP>

## Under the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood: Abduction and displacement from Rafah

During Mohamed Morsi's one-year rule as president of the republic, the targeting of Copts in North Sinai took two forms. The first was of threats and intimidation against Copts carried out by distributing leaflets demanding that they leave and firing gunshots in the direction of their homes or workplaces. A few weeks after the first armed attack on Egyptian military personnel in August 2012, Rafah Christians were subject to a wide campaign of intimidation, driving them to flee the region. On September 15, 2012, masked people distributed handwritten leaflets that read: «You Christians, leave here. You have 48 hours. You have been warned. You will only have yourselves toblame.»<sup>26</sup>

As a result, citizens of Rafah and Christian religious leaders in North Sinai informed military and police security officials of the threats, handing over the leaflets to them. Security officials, however, refused to document the incident, undermining protection need from the potential danger of the threats contained in the leaflets. On the evening of 25 September 2012, two armed men on a motorbike shot at a shop owned by Mamdouh Nassif, The shop front was destroyed in the attack, and the store's contents were damaged. Nassif, however, was not hurt.

The secretary-general of North Sinai governerate advised Rafah's Christians at the time to leave the city, saying that all he could do was to issue decrees appointing Coptic employees to work elsewhere. However, following a media outcry that sharply criticized the manner in which governorate officials handled the events, the governor of North Sinai retracted the transfer of Coptic state employees and made several attempts to convince them to stay, after promising to intensify the security presence in the city.

Kidnapping for ransom constituted the second pattern of persecution of Copts. EIPR documented six cases in which Copts were kidnapped during the first half of 2013, all of which ended after the payment of ransom, except in one case, where Sameh Awadallah managed to escape from his captors and sought the help of a tribal elder who provided him with protection until he returned to his house. Anonymous men later shot at his shop, injuring one of the workers. It was an incident that prompted Awadallah to sell his property and permanently leave Arish.

## After Morsi's ouster: displacement of Christians of Rafah and Sheikh Zuwayed

After former President Mohamed Morsi was removed from power in July 2013, incitement against Christians spread widely, with a number of mosques and groups allied to Morsi attributing partial responsibility to the Copts for this political development.

### **Attacks during the second half of 2013 can be classified into several types:**

**First**, there was the distribution of leaflets signed by «Supporters of Islamic Law [Ansaar al-Sharia] in the land of Al-Kananah.» One of the leaflets states that Christians «have declared war on Islam and its people in Egypt and have turned Egypt from a country of Islam with its stronghold

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26- For more details please see: EIPR: The forced displacement of the Copts of Rafah is not an isolated incident. The state must protect citizens in their homes rather than participate in their displacement. <http://bit.ly/2pTWBlx>

and fortified fortress into a secular crusader monstrosity, where the banner of Islam is not raised.” The leaflet continued its incitement stating that «they [Christians] are targeting the lives and property of Muslims and everyone who carries an Islamic symbol, such as the bearded, women wearing a face cover [Niqab], as well as trespassing on the sanctity of mosques; and that churches have become a fortresses and storehouses of weapons.» These leaflets were placed on the doors of Coptic citizens’ properties, both houses and shops. At the same time, a number of Christians of the city received warnings and threatening messages over mobile phones sent by unidentified individuals demanding that they leave and threatening to kill them.

**The second** classification focuses on incidents in which Christians were killed in targeted attacks. In the second half of 2013, three Copts were killed in separate incidents, the most prominent of which was the assassination of Pastor Mina Abboud Sharobim, a priest at the St. Mina and Pope Kyrillos Church in the Al-Masaid district in Arish, who was shot and killed by two masked men as he was driving his car from his home to his church. In the second incident, Magdy Lamie, a tradesman in electrical appliances, was kidnapped from a Tuesday market in Sheikh Zuwayed by an armed group in an SUV. His body was later found decapitated in the cemetery area east of Sheikh Zuwayed. In the third case, three masked men opened fire and killed Hany Samir Kamel, a sanitary ware dealer, while he was walking on Asyut Street in Arish. The assailants left a message beside Kamel’s body addressed to the Copts of Arish, telling them to either leave the city or be slaughtered.

**The third** classification concerns the burning of churches, notably, the attack on Arish’s St. George Church during the events of 14 August 2013. Prior to this date, the church had been attacked several times, with dozens of Morsi supporters having broken into the building, destroying its contents and the cross atop the church’s gate, before setting it ablaze.

St George Church was put on a list of churches destroyed following the violent dispersal of the Rabea al-Adaweya and Nahda Square sit-ins and to be reconstructed. The reconstruction of the church, however, has been totally abandoned amid the escalation of recent attacks against the Copts.

**The fourth** type of attack concerns the kidnapping Copts for ransom. On 28 July 2013, three masked men kidnapped a young Coptic man named Mena Mitri Shawki in front of his electric equipment shop on Asyut Street in Arish, where he was standing with his father. The kidnappers demanded that his family pay a ransom of 150,000 EGP. The young man returned to his family one week after he had been kidnapped, after his family paid the kidnappers through tribal elders and in coordination with security authorities.

These attacks drove an increasing number of Christians to leave the cities of Rafah and Sheikh Zuwayed. Twenty-five families living in the city of Rafah and four families residing in the city of Sheikh Zuwayed left for Arish. The two cities began to empty of all Christians, while the Christian presence persisted in Arish. Many Christian clergy members expressed fears of appearing publicly on the streets for fear of hate campaigns against them and the pamphlets that were distributed by militant Islamist groups. Churches in the governorates kept their doors closed most of the time in view of the absence of security presence.

Pastor Youssef Sobhy from the North Sinai Archeparchy said, «The churches of North Sinai have ceased to hold mass in view of the state of danger, armed clashes and targeting of churches, except for a short Friday mass each week. Copts are afraid to go to church. The situation in Arish is very bad. Everybody is in a state of fear. Christians from Rafah and Sheikh Zuwayed have deserted their homes and work and left. Also, several of Arish’s Christians have returned to the governorates they

came from. But there are still a few hundred Christian families in Arish, who move with great care in view of the clashes between terrorists and army and security forces.»

## 2014: A year without targeting

With the relative improvement of the security situation during the last three months of 2013, some 13 Coptic families from Arish returned to their homes, which they had deserted after Morsi's ouster for fear of being targeted. Their return came in line with a reassurance that security forces would return to the governorate. At the time, the bishop of North Sinai issued a decision to reopen the three churches that were closed in Arish. Armed Forces and police personnel reinforced their presence in front of the churches following the decision in order to secure them against any attempted attacks. The year 2014 passed without any incidents of targeting Copts or their property, making it the only year since the beginning of 2011 that passed without incident of sectarian tension or targeting. This development encouraged a number of families that had left Arish to return, especially in view of the difficult living conditions and inability of some of them to find work opportunities outside of Arish.

## 2015 and 2016: The Return of Killings at Wide Intervals

Incidents of targeting Christians resumed again at the beginning of 2015, especially during the months of January and February, when Nabil Mahrous and William Michel were killed, and Abdel Shaheed Tawfiq survived an attempt on his life. It is to be noted that masked men carrying out these attacks changed their strategy, beginning to target people in their private residences rather than in streets, public places and shops.

On 31 January 2015, three masked men killed Nabil Mahrous Ibrahim after breaking into his house in the South Arish Obour neighbourhood through an open back door. Once they entered the house, the masked men shot Ibrahim in the head in front of his children and his wife. On 12 February 2015, about 10 armed masked men stormed the house of Abdel Shaheed Tawfik Azer in the Samran neighborhood of Arish, but he managed to escape with his family through the back door of the house after hearing shots being fired in the air before the raid. The masked men burned the house down. On 23 February 2015, three masked men shot at William Michel while he was on his way to open his knife-sharpening shop located in the fish market in the center of Arish.

Following these attacks, a number of Copts left Arish, and some state employees submitted transfer requests to the governor of North Sinai, especially as some of them had received threatening messages. While North Sinai Bishop Qazman downplayed the danger, saying that Coptic families were not forced to leave the city of Arish, some of them preferred to leave temporarily for fear of being targeted. Qazman added that the recent incidents that had affected Coptic citizens did not constitute a danger to all Copts, because the violence affected both Muslims and Christians living in Sinai equally.

According to Rev. Gabriel Abraham, the pastor of the of North Sinai bishopric, churches continue to carry out religious service, but at irregular intervals, and upon an agreement between the priests and Coptic citizens depending on the contingencies of the situation. Abraham added that security forces are securing churches in the Masaid and Dahya districts.

Over the course of 2016, there were two incidents in which Copts were assassinated. In the first Rev. Raphael Moussa, the priest of St. George Church in Arish, died after sustaining three gunshot wounds to his head and body while repairing his car in the Arish district of Sad al-Wadi on June 30. The second incident took place on 2 May, when Massak Nasrallah was killed after an armed group stopped his car on his way back from work to Arish and questioned him about his religion.

## 2017: Departure or murder

The targeting of Copts intensified at the end of January 2017, when there were six documented incidents that resulted in seven deaths. The incidents began with the death of Wael Yousef Qaldas on 30 January. Qaldas was killed in the middle of the day while inside his shop on 23 July Street, the main thoroughfare in the center of Arish. The last incident was the death of Abu Romani on 23 February. The series of attacks were characterized by severe violence, targeting Copts in their places of residence, the immolation of their bodies, looting and property arson. The victims belonged to various neighbourhoods. The assailants also seized victims' mobile phones, thereby securing a ready database of names and phone numbers of the rest of the Christians in the city.

With the increased number of killings, a number of Copts sought assistance from state institutions and filed complaints to security authorities, documenting the threats they received through their cell phones and the leaflets that were left under the doors of their residences. However, they did not receive any meaningful responses from the government, not by tightening security measures or reassuring them of a plan for intervention and maintaining safety. The governor of North Sinai promised to give instructions to government bodies to give their employees a month's leave until the situation improves.

At the same time, a number of Copts reached out to Bishop Qazman, demanding that he lobby state bodies to take a stand against the deteriorating situation. However, Qazman informed them that he did not have communication channels with authorities to accomplish such an end, adding that terrorism is targeting military and police forces as well. He also told Coptic residents that every citizen bears responsibility for their own safety in choosing to stay and bear the consequences or leave until the security situation calms down.

The families stopped sending their children to school out of fear, and many men refrained from going to work and closed their shops. Only women went out, since the gunmen left the women alone and killed the men. Some resorted to turning off the lights in their houses at night to give the impression that nobody was living in the houses, while the majority of families stayed up late watching the windows, preparing to escape if gunmen arrived.

According to a testimony by a person displaced during the attacks, a shop owner said he closed his shop for a whole week. When he reopened it, because he survived on his daily income, he was only open to do so for two hours. When a passerby stared at the shop suspiciously, he became afraid, closed the shop and hurried home.

In light of these attacks and the prevailing feeling of fear among the Christians of North Sinai, the Islamic State published a video on 19 February 2017 claiming responsibility for the December 2016 St. Peter and St. Paul Church bombing and calling for further targeted killings of Christians, regardless of their differences and positions, and for attacks on their property all over Egypt. The video included the claim that the Copts are neither Dhimmis, nor cohabitants, and therefore «the Mujahedeen and believers in one God must target the Christians of Egypt, disrupt their lives wher-

ever they are and involve them in the cycle of conflict, since they belong to the crusaders fighting against Muslims.»

During the third week of February, there was a noticeable change in the pattern of attacks. Copts were targeted inside their homes. Bodies of victims were mutilated after being shot. And their houses were burned in the presence of the women of the family. A number of Christians also received threatening messages on their personal phones demanding that they leave. Leaflets were left underneath the doors of the residences conveying the same meaning. Samir, whose name has been changed to protect him, is one of many who were targeted. He found a leaflet in front of the door of his apartment in the Masaid district, which read: «Leave tomorrow. Otherwise your head will hang at your house, crusader.»

At the time, various groups began thinking of migrating from Arish. Some families who had extended family living in other governorates and cities moved to Cairo, Asyut and Ismailia, and some Muslim families encouraged their neighbours to emigrate for fear for their lives, especially considering their inability to intervene to prevent attacks when they occur, fearing the reaction of the militants.

A number of Arish Christians with extended family ties moved to Ismailia, especially to the west of Qantara Gharb, which, in addition to being the nearest governorate to North Sinai, also housed an Evangelical church which expressed its willingness to receive the Coptic migrants. The families came from areas that had been the site of killings, especially the neighbourhoods of Zohour, Samran, Safa, the area along 23 July Street and some of the streets of the Masaid and Raysa districts.

The Evangelical Church formed a coordination committee and allocated a phone number to receive SOS calls. The information spread among the people of Arish on Wednesday and Thursday, 22-23 February. Several informed the Orthodox Church in Arish of their intention to travel to Ismailia. Their request was ignored.

On Thursday evening, four families arrived in Ismailia. The number of those fleeing the city increased significantly by Friday morning, so much so that the influx exceeded the Evangelical Church's capacity to accommodate them, which led the Orthodox Church to act in cooperation and coordination with the Evangelical Church. A number of families were housed in apartments rented by the two churches in Mostaqbal city.

The families moved individually or in coordination with a limited number of neighbours. There was no organized or mass exodus, and most of them did not carry any property or any items used in their livelihoods, except for small bags of clothes. Some families left the keys to their houses with their Muslim neighbours. Displaced families faced major difficulties during the journey from North Sinai. The journey began in secrecy for fear that gunmen would discover their plans and target them, followed by a search for rental cars that would allow them to travel without being exposed to danger, and passing through the many security checkpoints on the outskirts of the city.

A number of Coptic activists who received the Copts of Arish at the Evangelical Church in Ismailia contacted state authorities who ignored the crisis and did not move to deal with it. That is except for the minister of youth, who decided to open the Ismailia Youth House on Mallahat road to the families. By Friday morning, 25 families had arrived in the city and were divided between Mostaqbal city and the youth hostel. The following day, the numbers increased significantly, reaching as many as 73 families. The government became involved through the minister of social solidarity and the governor of Ismailia, who visited the displaced families and promised to help them and see



to their welfare. They also decided to open the vocational training house of the ministry and the Qersh camp to accommodate these numbers.

At the same time, a number of families moved to Cairo, Asyut, Minya, Alexandria, Gharbiya, Sharqiya, Qalyubiya, Beni Suef, Daqahlia, Monufiya and the Red Sea, staying with extend family who agreed to host them.

According to a statement by the Ismailia Diocese on 19 March 2017, 204 Christian families migrated from North Sinai, 24 of who moved to the Port Said Governorate, where some found accommodation in the governorate's guest houses, while others were hosted by the church in Port Fouad. In Ismailia, 180 families found full accommodation in Mostaqbal city in Ismailia, where the Ministry of Social Solidarity, in partnership with other ministries and associations, provided 120 fully equipped housing units. The Ismailia Diocese contributed to this effort, while the Archeparchy hosted 60 families in apartments rented from private owners in Mostaqbal city at the beginning of the crisis.

Along the same line, Sharqiya Governor General Khalid Said made arrangements for eight Coptic families, which included 33 individuals, providing accommodations in residential units in Zagazig and concluding procedures to finalize reappointments in the various corresponding service directorates within the governorate. General Mahmoud Ashmawy, the governor of Qalyubiya, said that the governorate had received nine displaced families, who were resettled in Khosous, Shubra al-Khaimah and Banha. Six families left for Minya and four families were resettled in the village of Ibwan, in the Matai district in the north of the governorate. Two families went to stay with their relatives in Mallawi.

## **Role of State Agencies: Security Failure and Social Support**

To determine the extent of a state institution's responsibility and role in the escalation and consequences of events, as much as to determine the extent of their success or failure in dealing with the crisis, we would have to examine two aspects. The first concerns security and how it was handled during events and their escalation. The second is related to the role of the government in managing the repercussions of the violence and supporting the displaced families at an economic and social level to manage the living conditions of their circumstance.

### **Role of the Security Services: Lack of foresight and absence of intervention**

The role of security authorities was characterized by a failure to protect citizens whose lives were threatened. The forces failed to protect them from exposure to harm and to protect their property. The failure persisted through an inability to interpret the development of the situation and intervene accordingly to prevent further deterioration. The negative perception of the role of security forces coloured the testimonies of Christians escaping North Sinai. Many of those interviewed accused security forces of failing to take action to protect them, of ignoring the threats they were receiving and of not taking seriously enough the targeted attacks that left Copts dead.

According to the testimony of the displaced, the most prominent aspects of security shortcomings include:

- A security absence inside the city. Security forces were present at checkpoints outside the city and at the entrances to the main roads. However, security did not regularly move inside the city, which allowed the perpetrators to kill Copts, especially at times when they fail to target security forces. It also provided them with ample time to commit their crimes. In one attack, the masked men who killed Wael Yousef entered a shop, consumed some food and beverages, and stole some of the contents of the shop. This is an indication of their confidence that no police would come, despite the fact that the incident took place at midday in the presence of bystanders.

In the testimony provided to EIPR, Adel said:

*«There are significant intervals between the security campaigns they launch. Each campaign lasts for two hours, during which time they round up people who do not carry IDs or drive in the wrong direction. However, they have no intention of arresting those they know are terrorists. The police used to say that the terrorists are at the periphery of the city. How did they succeed now in entering into the heart of the city where there are all these military and police forces? How do they pass in their midst carrying their weapons?»*

- Despite repeated incidents of targeted attacks since 2013, security authorities did not develop a plan to deal with the developing circumstances. Their performance was characterized by a slow pace and shortcomings in the interventions aimed at protecting people. Within three weeks of an initial incident, attacks were repeated without any reaction by security forces to protect citizens. Despite their proximity to attack sites, security forces usually arrived late, after more than an hour had passed. This is what happened in case of the fourth victim of early 2017. Gamal Tawfiq Girgis was a trader shot in the head on 16 February 2017, while he was selling shoes in the Thursday market in the Samran neighbourhood of Arish. Despite the proximity of the market to the police station, security personnel came an hour after the attack.

- Security forces did not move to protect Copts who decided to leave the city in fear for their lives. Despite the ample information available to security, government and religious officials in Arish, people were left without any protection. During their escape for the city, they were stopped at checkpoints and searched before being allowed to continue their escape.

- In all incidents of targeting that Copts mentioned in this report, whether kidnapping or religious identity-based killings, none of the perpetrators was arrested. In addition, no government bodies announced any information regarding the results of related criminal investigations and whether or not there were suspects known to security authorities and investigative bodies or whether there is no culprit to begin with.

There were a number of attacks on the private property of Coptic families after they fled the area. A number of houses were looted on several occasions. On 4 March 2017, unknown individuals set fire to the empty house of Munir Malak in the Shorbagi neighbourhood of Masaid. Three houses in the Safa district owned by Adly Suleiman, Gamal Adly, and Adly's son were subject to looting and theft after their owners escaped.

- A lack of transparency and an information blackout regarding the course of events, an attitude that does not respect citizen's right to knowledge, the repercussions of the crisis and the reasons that led to the failure of security authorities to protect the security and safety of citizens. The Ministry of Interior should have informed Egyptian citizens of the extent of fear that affected North Sinai Christians after the escalation in targeted attack and threats, as much as of the reasons for its non-intervention to prevent their displacement or to ensure their protection during their escape. The Ministry of Interior issued only one statement, saying that it did not ask the Christians of Arish to leave for other governorates, but that the residents themselves took the initiative for fear of their lives. The ministry asserted that it was a departure rather than a displacement from Arish.

## **Role of Political and Social authorities: Accommodation and support for the displaced and no vision for a return**

In the beginning of the crisis, executive bodies and officials in the governorate of North Sinai ignored the events and reduced the gravity of their repercussion. Officials and the media ignored incidents of targeted attacks on Copts, including those linked to murder and arson. When requested to intervene by the citizens of the city, General North Sinai Governor Abdel Fattah Harhour, the governor of North Sinai, said that all he could do was to give orders to officials in the various government departments to issue Copts working in the public sector a month's leave, in case they wish to leave the city until it was brought under control again.

Although a contingent of Arish Christians announced they were leaving the city out of fear for their lives, local governorate bodies did not move to help them, nor did they look for ways to provide them with alternative residences or means of livelihood. Citizens were left to decide where to move, a decision dependent on the presence of relatives in other governorates or the solicitation of help from the church in Ismailia, without any form of support or solidarity. The absence of state solidarity with the victims reflects the extent of the danger which hundreds of citizens could face on their escape journey. It also reflects the failure of local authorities to deal with humanitarian crises. If it was difficult for security bodies to work on the ground, what kept the directorates of health, social solidarity, transport and others from helping those citizens?

None of the officials of North Sinai or Ismailia was there to receive Christian families arriving to Ismailia on Thursday and Friday (23 and 24 February). State bodies began to engage with the crisis on Friday evening, after images of the dire conditions of the displaced in the churchyard, waiting for shelter, had been disseminated. When arrivals exceeded the capacity of the Evangelical and Orthodox churches, the minister of youth was contacted. He instructed the Ismailia youth hostel to accommodate a number of families.

The executive and administrative officials' interventions on Saturday were influenced by the media outcry stirred by the scene of displaced families. Social Solidarity Minister Ghada Waly and the Ismailia governor visited the families in the youth hostel. The way she spoke with the displaced indicated that she was not aware of the size of the problem. After listening to those that had been displaced express their fears, the minister said that, within a few days «those people will return to their homes, much sooner than you think.»<sup>27</sup>

On the same day, Sisi held a meeting to discuss the crisis, calling for the prime minister to set up an operation team to follow up on the provision of services to Coptic families who moved from Arish to Ismailia, as well as to demand that the government undertake all necessary measures to facilitate citizens finding accommodation in the areas they moved to and to resolve any obstacles they might face.

The Cabinet issued a statement asserting that the Prime Minister Sherif Ismail ordered the formation of an operations room in the Cabinet to follow up on the provision of services to the displaced families in coordination with the governors of Ismailia, Qalyubiya, Cairo and Asyut, in addition to the Evangelical and Orthodox churches. He also authorized the minister of solidarity to go to Ismailia to follow the situation on the ground, and the minister of youth and sports to coordinate with the governor of Ismailia to follow up on the situation and provide all necessary facilities.

Ismail indicated that adequate accommodation was provided to families in the Ministry of Youth and Sports hostel in Ismailia and the Mostaqbal city houses of the Evangelical Church, as well as follow-up services to families who had moved to other governorates and the urgent provision of food and blankets. The prime minister also said that families' need for medicines was being met, and that there was close coordination with Ismailia Governorate officials to provide medical care through a Suez Canal University medical team and the establishment of a mobile clinic.

Even if the government actually provided residential apartments to displaced families in Ismailia, that did not happen with those displaced to other governorates. Those residing temporarily with their relatives in Port Said, Cairo, Giza and Alexandria, among other places, did not receive the same degree of attention.

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<sup>27</sup> Meeting by minister of social solidarity with some of the displaced families. (video). <http://bit.ly/2pTZysp>

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education issued decrees that granted all Coptic students enrolment in the school nearest to their current place of residence, waiving the requirement to provide any official papers. Indeed, a first group of 75 students enrolled at basic education levels, while co-ordination efforts ensured the enrolment of higher education students at Suez Canal University, providing them places in the students' dormitories in addition to all necessary forms of support.

According to a statement published by the social solidarity directorate in North Sinai, 258 Coptic families left Arish for other governorates,<sup>28</sup> a figure made up of 121 families in Ismailia, 44 in Cairo, 12 in Daqahlia, 32 in Port Said, three in Asyut, nine in Qalyubiya, five in Minya, five in Giza, one family in Fayoum, eight in Sohag, 10 in Sharqiya, six in Gharbiya and two families in Beni Suef.

The undersecretary of the ministry of social solidarity in North Sinai said that the families that moved from Arish to the governorates of Sharqiya, Gharbiya, Asyut, Qalyubiya and Giza live with their relatives, while the Minya Governorate provided residential apartments. The rest of the families in other governorates, according to the undersecretary, lived in various places provided by each governorate respectively. A number of Christian families who lived in more secure places within North Sinai, official facilities in the Dahia neighbourhood and a section of the Masaid district, decided to stay in Arish, according to the church. Families residing in the city and villages of Bir al-Abd also did not leave.

Generally, the ministries of social solidarity and youth's management of the provision of services since Saturday 25 February was positive and responsive to basic needs. Temporary apartments, furnished in collaboration with the church and civil society organizations, were secured for the displaced. Students were transferred to schools close to their temporary places of residence.

However, the state's manner of handling the situation prompts questions regarding the fate of those families in the future: Are the places of temporary residence long or short term? Does the government have an alternative plan to improve living conditions in the city of Arish and alter the conditions that drove Christians to leave? Or will the government judge the small, furnished flats to be sufficient aide?

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28- Youm7: Social solidarity directorate in North Sinai: 258 families left for 13 governorates. 5 March 2017. <http://bit.ly/2p5gOa2>

## Arish Incidents from a Human Rights Perspective

There were a number of violations to the rights of Christian citizens during the recent events in Arish. The state is politically and legally responsible for rights stipulated by international human rights treaties and the Egyptian Constitution. The Egyptian Government ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights with the issuance of Presidential Decree No. 536/1981, which was published in the Official Gazette on April 15, 1982, thus becoming one of the laws of the country, in accordance with Article 93 of the 2014 Constitution, which reads: «The State shall be bound by international human rights agreements, covenants and conventions ratified by Egypt, and which shall have the force of law after publication in accordance with the prescribed conditions.»

### I. Violation of the right to life: Crimes of murder and kidnapping

International human rights instruments give priority to the right to life as a fundamental right on which all other rights are based. Article 6 of the ICCPR states that «Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of their life.» This protection is not limited to ordinary peace situations but also extends to states of emergency and armed conflicts. As a matter of fact, the responsibility of police and military forces is manifold in those cases where they must maintain the security and safety for all citizens.

The Egyptian Constitution affirms this right in Articles 59 and 60 and considers, «*Everyone has the right to a safe life. The State shall provide security and reassurance for its citizens and all those residing in its territory,*» and «*The human body is inviolable and any assault, deformation or mutilation committed against it shall be a crime punishable by Law.*»

Fourteen people were deprived of this right when they were killed by masked men in the recent events between July 2013 and February 2017. All of those in question were targeted on the grounds of their religious identity in various locales, including their private residences, public spaces or transportation vehicles. The killings constitute murder as defined by the law. This is in addition to the cases of kidnapping that EIPR documented, the victims of which were subjected to physical assault and harm before their release in exchange for a ransom paid by their relatives. The details of this category of violation are mentioned in detail in the annex on «Targeting incidents.»<sup>29</sup>

A number of eyewitnesses and victims' families reported that masked men usually shot the victims, then seized their personal belongings, with attention to personal telephones, and then fled without being arrested. Despite the commonalities in the ways these attacks were carried out and their proximity in frequency, the state failed to undertake the necessary measures to ensure that these attacks were not repeated. According to the law, the responsibility of identifying unknown civilians and those that

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29- According to a number of ecclesiastical sources, the number of victims killed was about 16 Christians, but the number of cases that EIPR managed to document by name and circumstances of the targeting was 14 Christians

incite others to commit such violations, which are crimes of murder, lies with the respective investigation bodies, a duty which had not been fulfilled in the case of targeting Christians in North Sinai.

## II. Violation of the right to property protection, choice of adequate housing and not to be forcibly displaced

A major responsibility lies with state institutions to protect private property and ensure that citizens enjoy their rights. Article 33 of the Egyptian Constitution states that «The State shall protect ownership according to its three types: the public, the private and the cooperative.» In Article 35, the Constitution states, «Private properties shall be protected.» This constitutional obligation has been breached and state institutions have not played their role as set out in the Constitution. Coptic Christians' properties have been subjected to repeated incidents of attack, including arson, looting, and theft from shops and homes. In many instances, these attacks are coupled with physical violence that left the owners dead. In this context, the state did not play its role in compensating or helping residents to mitigate the harms that had befallen them.

During the recent displacement incidents, there were widespread attacks, including collective punishment on the grounds of religious identity. This was most notable in the attack on private property, both before and after Copts fled from the area. For example, on 12 March 2017, four houses belonging to Christians in Arish that had been abandoned by their owners when they fled in fear for their lives, were subjected to theft and looting.

Security bodies failed to predict the attacks and undertake preventive intervention before attacks escalated, even though police and executive officials knew that there was an attack on religious identity. Houses were burned and shops were looted and burned without any intervention to prevent the attacks or arrest the perpetrators.

Forced displacement is one of the worst violations that took place during recent events in Arish. Fearing for their lives, Christians in the city were forced to abandon their property and the places where they lived and had established social and economic relations. This is a gross violation of human rights and an evasion by the state of its obligation to protect all individuals and groups from forced displacement. The Egyptian Constitution has categorically criminalized forced displacement and considered it a crime with no statute of limitation in view of its gravity and the seriousness of the violations that develop thereafter. Article 63 states: «All forms and types of arbitrary forced displacement of citizens shall be prohibited and shall be a crime that does not lapse by prescription.»

Therefore, immediately after the events, both the Egyptian government and the Orthodox Church tried to mitigate the violations and rationalize them. Both declared that they refused to describe what had happened as forced displacement. The Ministry of the Interior denied that it had asked citizens to leave Arish, and the government in its press releases and in statements by officials avoided the use of the term «displacement,» instead using the phrase «the departure of the Copts.» General Yassin Taher, the governor of Ismailia, said «This is not a displacement or organized migration, as we are frequently hearing. This is a matter of hospitality and decision taken in accord with the personal will of some families.»<sup>30</sup>

30- Statements by General Yasin Taher, the governor of Ismailia, in a conference attended by the chair and members of the Human Rights Committee of the House of Representatives held at the Alkersh Youth Center, a guest house for displaced families, on 2 March 2017.

In his sermon on 1 March 2017, Pope Twadros II said that «the term displacement, which is widely used in the media, is totally unacceptable. We live in the homeland, and our children in the Armed Forces, police, state institutions and our Coptic Egyptian children, as well as Muslims too, are subject to this violence.»

The pope said that what happened was a passing crisis, and that he was confident that «with the kind efforts of the state and the directives of the president and the participation of all ministers and the university in accepting our children in schools and in university, and in mitigating the effects of this emergency crisis, I trust that these efforts, when completed, [those families] will return to their places of choice.»

The ICCPR, which has become part of Egyptian law, as mentioned above, defines forced displacement as a «systematic practice by governments, paramilitary forces or groups that are intolerant towards racial, religious or doctrinal groups with the aim of evacuating certain lands and replacing in their stead other population groups.»

Forced displacement is either direct, through forceful displacement of populations from their residences, or indirect by driving people to leave and migrate by using means of pressure, intimidation and persecution.

Displacement is usually the result of internal armed conflicts or violence of a religious, ethnic or tribal nature and is carried out by the will of one of the conflict parties when it has the requisite power to remove the parties belonging to other population groups. As a result, the target group develops a sense of immediate threat in case it refuses to migrate.

Forced displacement differs from eviction, necessary or involuntary displacement to which diverse population groups are forced, from one city, area or residential location to areas that are safer, due to a general sense of a direct danger for all, either as in a state of war between two or more states, or due to natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanoes and floods.

This definition of forced displacement applies to the situation of the Copts of Arish. There is targeting based on religious identity, which, as mentioned above, took several forms, including the distribution of threatening leaflets, repeated killings, kidnappings and the looting of private property. As these attacks escalated and with the lack of state intervention, there was a direct threat to all Christians in North Sinai, especially in view of previous displacements from Rafah and Sheikh Zuwayed.

### III. Religious hate speech

Article IV of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination on the basis of Religion or Belief (1981) states that:

*«All States shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life; and all States shall make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation where necessary to prohibit any such discrimination, and to take all appropriate measures to combat intolerance on the grounds of religion or belief in this matter.»*



The method of dealing with the incidents of displacement in Arish and other incidents of sectarian attacks and incitement of hatred revealed that the state acted superficially to stop the attacks without addressing the root causes of these problems and drawing the necessary legislation to confront religious hate speech.

In recent events of Arish, and despite the recurring distribution of leaflets containing religious incitement to violence and threats to Christians to leave or be killed, which were thrown in front of the homes or workplaces of Christians or reached them via messages on their personal phones, state bodies did not react seriously.

Although there is a constitutional provision obliging the Parliament to endorse a commission to prevent discrimination and set penalties for officials and individuals who become involved in any actions that discriminate between citizens, Parliament has yet to issue a law related to the establishment of such a commission, and there has yet to be debate concerning its formation. This casts doubt on the seriousness of the legislative and executive institutions to address the violence.

## Conclusions

- The targeting of Christians in North Sinai is carried out on the basis of religious identity. It differs from the targeted attacks carried out by the Province of Sinai on security and military forces or tribal elders whom the organization describes as security agents: their victims among the security forces include Christians killed because of their work with or enlisted station in the Egyptian Armed Forces rather than because of their religion. It has also been proved that the Province of Sinai incited sectarian hatred and threatened Christians to leave or be killed, subsequently acting upon those threats in a number of cases of murder.
- What happened in Arish satisfies the description of forced displacement in accordance with international conventions on human rights, no matter how many attempts are made to mitigate the severity of what happened and its consequences.
- These events cannot be read in isolation from what is dictated in the customary reconciliation sessions held to settle sectarian disputes in other parts of the republic, which impose conditions contrary to the Constitution and the law. The most important of these, as mentioned earlier, was forced displacement of entire families from their villages and the governorates where they live. The difference may be that, in previous cases, the state approved or was responsible for the deportation decisions. In North Sinai, the state was unable to intervene and prevent this new situation.
- In the past six years, the state has completely failed to deal with the terrorist attacks carried out by the Province of Sinai and other armed groups targeting Christian citizens. Despite the recent wave of attacks, the state deals with the problem in the same way, leaving victims to their fate. The result of this mishandling has been to accept the exclusion of Christians on the pretext of protecting them, instead of enforcing safety and security on the ground and protecting citizens. This occurred in the cities of Rafah, in 2012 and 2013, Sheikh Zuwayed, in 2013, Arish, in 2013 and 2015. The state did not make use of these events to develop alternative strategies to prevent the forcible displacement of Copts.
- The Egyptian government may have succeeded in supporting a sector of displaced families and providing housing and livelihoods for a large sector of them, but it failed to develop an integrated plan to deal with the recent crisis, including a time frame or procedures to ensure the expedient return of the displaced people. Instead, it normalized the situation, treating the displaced as if they would not return to their homes and property.
- Despite strict security measures, foremost among them the state of emergency in North Sinai and the collaboration between military and civilian police forces to maintain internal security, the state's efforts have not succeeded in reducing terrorist incidents. According to testimonies by a number of citizens in Sinai, a state of tension and antipathy exists between the residents and security forces, which makes the mission of the latter more difficult and reduces their chances of obtaining information about the perpetrators or those involved in the attacks. Therefore, security solutions alone are insufficient to deal with the phenomenon of terrorism. There is an urgent need for economic, social and cultural interventions that take into consideration the special nature of the governorate, on the one hand, and the need to enforce the law and prevent attacks, on the other.

## Recommendations

- Set a time-bound plan to enforce security and ensure the protection of the displaced who wish to return to Arish. Help those who want to stay in new areas by providing them with decent living opportunities, including work opportunities close to their homes, as well as the aid they might need.
- Protecting the abandoned property of Coptic families, as well as providing appropriate compensation proportional to the size of the property for those who do not want to return to Arish and therefore want to dispense of their property.
- To deal transparently with these events and to disclose the findings gathered by search and investigation bodies as well as identifying the culprits involved in the attacks, bringing them to justice.

## Annex I: Report methodology

In the preparation of this report, EIPR depended on the monitoring and documentation of cases of sectarian tension and violence since the 25 January 2011 revolution. In some cases, EIPR has also produced detailed position papers or addressed the incidents within broader EIPR reports concerning freedom of religion and belief. These included:

- Report: Copts under military rule, 9 October 2012

[https://eipr.org/sites/default/files/pressreleases/pdf/copts\\_under\\_military\\_rule.pdf](https://eipr.org/sites/default/files/pressreleases/pdf/copts_under_military_rule.pdf)

- Press release: EIPR: Forced displacement of Rafah Copts is not an individual incident. The state must protect citizens in their homes instead of participating in their displacement, 30 September 2012

[https://www.eipr.org/press?date\\_filter%5Bvalue%5D%5Byear%5D=2012&tid\\_i18n=162&tid\\_i18n\\_1=All](https://www.eipr.org/press?date_filter%5Bvalue%5D%5Byear%5D=2012&tid_i18n=162&tid_i18n_1=All)

- EIPR also depended on the outcomes of three fact finding missions investigating incidents mentioned in the report, including:

-Fact finding mission to the cities of Arish and Rafah on 22 May 2013

-A fact-finding mission to the city of El Arish on July 13, 2013, following the killing of priest Mina Abboud and the slaughter of Magdy Lamie in Sheikh Zuwaid

-Fact finding mission to the city of Ismailia to meet with Arish migrants on 26 February 2017

EIPR interviewed a large number of families of victims of Arish incidents at various points in time in the cities of Cairo and Suez, in addition to dozens of phone conversations with eyewitnesses, religious and executive authorities, as well as some documentation, including pictures of attacks or the death certificates of victims.

*In this report EIPR used pseudonyms in place of the real names of eyewitnesses and the displaced upon the request by some of them and for fear for the lives and safety of witnesses, even when they expressed a wish to mention their real names. EIPR made that choice in view of the complicated security and political situation in North Sinai.*

## Annex II: Incidents of Targeting Copts in North Sinai since 25 January 2011

**1. 29 January 2011:** Vandalism of churches in Sinai began on 29 January and lasted for several consecutive days. The St. George and Holy Family church in Rafah, North Sinai was subjected to armed attacks, looting, theft and torching. Through its investigations, EIPR was informed that, at 4 pm, a group of masked men carrying machine guns threatened a church mentor, and then stole contents of the church.

In the course of these attacks and vandalism, the main perpetrators were joined by a group of about 200 people who descended from their cars, smashed the lights and church glass, broke into the church, destroyed the cross on top of the dome, and stole the wooden pews and the interior doors.

The next day, another group of masked youths came and stole the church's main iron gate and then set fire to the building.

On the third day, groups of citizens removed the marble from the floors and stairs, and tried to demolish the dome. According to eyewitness testimony provided to EIPR, the church priest went immediately after the incidents to the security directorate presiding over the area in which the church was located to file an official complaint over what happened and to demand the deployment of troops to protect what remained of the church. However, security officials refused to register the complaint, saying that the directorate and police departments are threatened by the threat of the arrival and attack of the masked men at any moment, and that is why there is no room for reporting such attacks. The priest of the church then went to the General Intelligence Services, which dealt with the issue ten days after the attacks by sending armoured military vehicles to protect the church, according to information obtained by EIPR.

Pastor Michael Anton from St. George Church in Arish told EIPR that, on 29 January 2011, after security had retreated from its posts, the St. George Church and the Holy Family in Rafah was robbed, looted and burned. It was the only church in the whole of Rafah.

Anton also said that the aggressors «destroyed and demolished some of the walls of the church, removed the marble from the walls and stairs. They even took the iron gate. They burned the pictures and icons, stole almost everything inside the church, and burned what they could not carry. Despite that, there is no indication of any compensation by the state, although we have submitted a memorandum covering the theft, looting and burning to the ministries of interior and finance.»

North Sinai Bishop Qazman submitted several requests to governorate officials to reconstruct and renovate the church to be able to use it for prayer. However, his requests were denied on grounds of the weakness of security presence.

**2. 12 February 2011:** Continued attacks on churches in Sinai. The guesthouse of Bishop Maqqar in the Masaid neighbourhood in Arish was attacked. Electric appliances, furniture and furnishings were stolen. The incident followed the attack on Arish police stations II and III and the Mubarak library.

**3. 15 September 2012:** Distribution of leaflets and shooting to force Rafah Copts to migrate. A masked man riding a motorbike left handwritten leaflets at three stores owned by Copts in the city of Rafah: Gamal Ayad, Mamdouh Nasif and Magdi Mashreqi. The leaflet was a page of a copybook, handwritten with spelling mistakes, saying: «Christians, leave here. You have 48 hours. You have been warned. You have only yourselves to blame.»

Thereupon, citizens of Rafah and Christian religious leaders in North Sinai informed military and police senior security officials and handed them the leaflets. Again, security officials refused to report the incident and downplayed the danger of the content of the warnings written on the leaflets.

On the evening of Tuesday, 25 September 2012, two armed men driving a motorbike fired shots at a shop owned by Mamdouh Nassif, destroying the storefront and damaging its contents. The owner of the shop was not injured, as he fled and hid in a neighbouring cafe. The next day, a delegation of Christian citizens went to the office of the governor of North Sinai and met with the secretary general of the governorate. He asked them to leave Rafah and said that all he could do was issue directives relocating Coptic employees to Arish.

When residents complained about the lack of accommodation for them and that the cost of living in Arish was more expensive than Rafah, he replied: «Turn to the church. Maybe it can help you.» He also asked the people of Rafah to stay in their homes and not to leave them or go to work until relocation procedures were finalized, promising that those will be counted as normal working days. Nine out of a total of about fifteen families left Rafah. For sale signs were hung on their houses while the remaining families stayed on, despite being confined to their homes and not going to work.

Security authorities did not arrest any person involved in the incidents, nor was any compensation paid by the state to the church. A number of residents reported that, during the period between the attack on the church and recent events, Christian women and schoolchildren were occasionally harassed in the streets.

Governorate officials denied that Copts in Rafah had been displaced. They claimed that residents left their homes fearing for their lives, which led Bishop Pachomius, as representative of the Coptic Orthodox pope, to release a statement saying: «We greatly regret the recurrence of incidents of displacement of Copts from their homes and their provinces, forcibly, at times, and, at times, following their receipt of threats. The displacement began in the Amiriya area, then spread to the Dahshur area, and today terror and threats are being painfully instilled in the hearts of our Coptic children in Rafah, with the aim to displace them from their homes. Although the media published [reports] about these abuses more than a month ago, responsible authorities have still not undertaken the necessary measures about what has been published, nor did they provide security to Egyptian families who have the right to live safely in their homes.»

Pachomius demanded that relevant authorities «deal with these acts, which attempt to undermine state authority and to present it in a manner that is not appropriate, as unable to protect its citizens.» He also called for the need to provide security for all citizens.

A military police and civilian police force moved to Rafah later, toured the city in mobile patrols and asked the Christian residents to stay in the city.

The president of the republic addressed the crisis on 29 September 2012, when Yasser Ali, the presidential spokesperson, said in a press statement that the president ordered the implementation of maximum protection in Sinai and had called for the return of families as soon as possible. Ali

asserted that the presidency does not accept the type of situation that had unfolded in the area for any Egyptian citizen, stressing that Copts are citizens endowed with the right to stay in their homes and be provided with protection. The spokesperson added that North Sinai governor and all security authorities do not accept the displacement of Copts and will work to return these families to their homes as soon as possible.

North Sinai Governor General Abdel Fattah Harhour met with Coptic families in Rafah on 30 September at the Virgin Mary Church guesthouse, in the presence of Bishop Qazman. The meeting lasted for several hours and was marked by long arguments. The governor refused to respond to Christians' demands to transfer from Rafah to Arish and their assertion that security had failed to protect them. Christian families threatened to protest in front of the governor's office. «Nobody will twist my arm," Harhour reportedly said. When Christians continued to plead for assistance in the face of death threats in the event of their return, the governor and security advisor Major General Sharif Ismail replied, «Your blood is in our necks [We are responsible for your safety]."

Fayza Abdel Sayed, one of the Copts attending the meeting, shouted in response, «What good will the blood do us after I lose my children? Will you appoint each of us somebody to walk behind us to protect us? I have not seen my daughter for ten days. I sent her to Asyut out of fear for her safety and her future is threatened. She is studying for the final stage of the high school certificate and is now cut off from school."

At the end of the meeting, the governor agreed with the Christian families to facilitate their return to their homes in Rafah and settle there with their children. He pledged to protect them, provide security for the city, bear any responsibility that may result from their return, and to hold another meeting with them the following week to ascertain their satisfaction with their security situation and that of the whole of the city.

**4. 7 January 2013:** Armed Forces prevents an attempt to bomb deserted St. George Church in Rafah. The Armed Forces spokesperson announced that the military had prevented an attempt to bomb Rafah's St. George Church at dawn on 7 January. The church had been abandoned since it was looted and set ablaze at the end of January 2011.

Armed Forces spokesperson Colonel Ahmed Mohammed Ali issued a statement on his Facebook page, asserting that elements of the Armed Forces operating in North Sinai thwarted an attempt to blow up a church in Rafah at one o'clock in the morning, after three military patrols succeeded in seizing two cars (a Toyota Double Cab and a light blue Daewoo Lanos without plates) behind the Safa neighborhood between the church and one of the military units under construction.

The military spokesperson stated that one of the two cars fled with a group of masked elements and that the search of the other vehicle revealed four packs of TNT, two automatic weapons, two safes, 50 bullets, five electric detonators, an RPG launcher and an RPG barrel. Military forces are currently searching the area for the other vehicle.

The Armed Forces released another statement asserting that the three military patrols were able to locate the two cars, one of them being a pickup truck found in an area behind the church and another that fled at high speeds when it was approached. A search of the truck turned up weapons and explosive.

**5. 1 February 2013:** A four-by-four Thai Toyota stops a taxi transporting Sameh Awadallah at 11 pm from work to his house. Armed masked men exited the vehicle and told Awadallah to leave the taxi. He tried to resist them, but one of the men stabbed his hand with a dagger to pry his grip

from the taxi. Then men then assaulted him, kidnapped him and drove him to a desert location close to Algora village in the south of Sheikh Zuwayed and to the east of Arish, taking him along the Shakarba back road, away from the main road.

Sameh Awadallah, 46 years old, is the owner of the only bar in Arish, which is attached to the Grand Show restaurant on Al-Fateh street (the sea road). He opened the restaurant upon his arrival in Arish from Sharqiya about 15 years ago, according to his statement to EIPR researchers.

By morning, the kidnappers had all fallen asleep, so Awadallah attempted to escape. Once outside the hut they had thrown him in, he ran toward the asphalt. One of the elders, Sheikh Ahmed Abu Daoud, provided him with protection until he was able to return home.

After three weeks with his family in Sharqiya, during which time the wounds in his hand healed, Awadallah returned to Arish to continue his life. However, on the evening of Coptic Easter, Sunday 5 May 2013, gunman fire at the storefront of his shop. Ramy, one of the workers, was injured in the attack. Sameh closed the shop permanently and left Arish to reside in Cairo.

**6. 5 February 2013:** Citizens inform security authorities that Sobhy Mosaad Ibrahim, 35, had been kidnapped. Ibrahim, a scraps dealer, was taken from his house in Sheikh Zuwayed. Report No. 139/administrative from Sheikh Zuwayed stated that two anonymous individuals were responsible for the kidnapping. Sobhy was released a week later in exchange for a ransom.

**7. 26 April 2013:** Armed men abducted Gamal Eid and his son, Wagdy, from Rafah, demanding a 500,000 EGP ransom in exchange for their release. Two days later, after paying the ransom, the two were released after being threatened to leave the city. The family moved to Arish. After the recent incidents, Eid then left Arish for Alexandria to live with his relatives, leaving all his possessions in Arish.

**8. 14 May 2013:** Anonymous armed men abducted Dr. Wadie Ramsis, the owner of a private hospital, as he was driving his car on Cairo Street in Arish. The men shot at Ramsis's car. He suffered a gunshot wound in the arm. They then took him to an unknown location and later released him, after his family paid a ransom of 1.5 million EGP.

**9. 15 May 2013:** Gamal Shenuda, the owner of a cement shop in the Safa neighborhood of Arish, was abducted, before being released upon payment of a 300,000 EGP ransom.

**10. 5 July 2013:** A leaflet was distributed in North Sinai signed by «The followers of Sharia in Ard Elkenana») that asserted that Copts «have declared war against Islam and its followers in Egypt, turning Egypt from a country of Islam and its [Islam's] stronghold and protector, to a crusaders' secular monstrosity, where the flag of Islam cannot be raised.» The leaflet stated that Copts "are targeting the lives and property of Muslims and everyone who exhibits an Islamic symbol, such as the bearded, women wearing a face cover [Niqab], as well as trespassing on the sanctity of mosques and that churches have become a fortresses and storehouses of weapons.»

**11. 6 July 2013:** Two masked men shot St. Mina and Pope Kyrillos Church Pastor Mina Aboud Sharobim, in the Masaid area of Arish. The priest was driving from his home to the church, when he was approached by two masked men. The pastor refused to stop his car (Daewoo, silver, plate number RAD 965). The white Verna car of the attackers turned around, opened fire and shot him, causing his car to stop. They moved toward him and forcibly pulled him out of his car, and shot at him again, killing him. One of the men drove his car toward the asphalt road in the direction of the Sabil area, where the car was later found stuck in the sand. The assailants' car fled via another road.



According to the testimony Pastor Youssef Sobhy from the North Sinai Archeparchy, Sharobim was shot 12 times in the head and chest, killing him instantly.

According to the testimony that Sharobim's wife and his Coptic friends gave to EIPR, he left his house in his clerical robes on his way to run a personal errand in the Edari district in the Masaïd district west of Arish, where the attack took place. He did not have more than 250 EGP on him at the time of the attack, according to his wife. The money was found on him after his body was transferred to a hospital.

The medical report issued by Arish General Hospital (No. 5660) on the same day he was killed (6 July 2013) states: «By undertaking the medical examination of the body, we found bullet holes: an entry and exit point in the right forearm, three entry and two exit points in the left forearm and four entry points, three in the back and one on the left side of the head»

**12. 6 July 2013:** Abduction and murder of Magdy Lamie. An armed group driving a four-wheel drive vehicle kidnapped Magdy Lamie, a 59-year-old electrical appliances dealer, on the evening of 6 July from Tuesday market in Sheikh Zuwayed. The armed group communicated with his family through intermediaries, demanding payment of a 500,000 EGP ransom in return for his release. After negotiations, the sum was reduced to 250,000 EGP. However, on 11 July, Lamie's body was found decapitated in the cemetery area east of Sheikh Zuwayed. The funeral ceremony was held in the Qantara West, after which his family left North Sinai.

The medical report issued by Arish health office II stated that «By examining the body of the deceased Magdy Lamie, 63 years old, it was found that his head was severed at the level of the seventh cervical vertebrae. Both arms were tied behind his chest by a white iron chain. There are severe lacerations and swelling around the wrists with scattered abrasions and bruises over chest, abdomen and legs.»

«It is likely that the head was severed from the body by a sharp bladed tool. The death happened no more than 12 hours ago.» The report was signed by the health inspector in Arish health office II on 11 July 2013.

According to information provided to EIPR by the victim's neighbours, a large number of the local population loved Lamie for his Palestinian origins. He had been a resident of Sinai since 1967 and he and his family were Egyptian citizens. At the same time, he was known for his religious activity, and was credited with seeking to build a church in Rafah.

**13. 28 July 2013:** Three masked men kidnapped a Coptic young man named Mena Mitri Shawky from in front of his electrical appliances shop on Asyut Street in Arish, where he was standing with his father. The kidnappers demanded a 150,000 EGP ransom for his release. The young man returned to his family a week after his abduction, and the family paid the kidnappers through tribal elders, and in coordination with security authorities.

**14. August 2013:** Leaflets were distributed in the Safa neighbourhood, southwest of Arish, threatening to target Coptic residents and demanding that they leave the area. The people who talked to EIPR about these developments were evidently struck by fear and anguish as a result of the threats. A number of Christians from the city also received anonymous warnings and threatening messages on their phones on 5 August. The messages urged them to leave North Sinai, giving an ultimatum that ended the following evening.

Some Christian clergy members expressed fears of appearing on public streets amid the anti-Cop-

tic incitement campaign, pamphlets distributed by takfir groups, and the fact that the churches in the governorate were closed most of the time because of the absence of security.

Pastor Youssef Sobhy from the North Sinai Archeparchy said «The churches of North Sinai have ceased to hold religious rites in light of the danger, armed clashes and the targeting of churches, with the exception of a short Friday mass every week. Copts are afraid to go to church. The situation in Arish is very bad. Everybody is in a state of fear. Christians in Rafah and Sheikh Zuwayed left their homes and businesses and left. There are also a number of Christians from Arish who returned back to the governorates from which they came. There are still several hundred Christian families in Arish, but they move very cautiously because of clashes between the terrorists and the army and security.

**15. 14 August 2013:** Arish's St. George Church was set ablaze after being attacked several times. Dozens of supporters of ousted President Mohammed Morsi stormed the church, destroyed its contents, broke the cross atop the gate, and set fire to it, destroying it completely.

St. George Church was the oldest church in Arish. There had been several attempts to attack it since the 25 January revolution, according to church officials. A report published by the Middle East News Agency (29 September 2013) asserts that North Sinai security arrested the main suspect in the burning of St. George Church: Mohamed Z., 33, a staff member at one of the private universities in Arish. Security took steps to arrest him after acquiring a video that had reportedly captured his face while setting fire to the church.

**16. 1 September 2013:** Three masked gunmen shot and killed Hany Samir Kamel, 37, a sanitary ware dealer, while he was walking on Asyut Street in Arish. Kamel was shot in his arm, shoulder and head. A threatening message was left on his body, addressed to Arish's Copts, warning them to leave or be slaughtered.

**17. 31 January 2015:** Three masked men killed Nabil Mahrous Ibrahim, a 50-year-old civil servant in the Arish Traffic Department, after breaking into his house in the Oubour district, south of Arish. The masked men entered his home through an open backdoor and then shot him in the head in front of his children and his wife, Inas Reda. In her testimony to EIPR, Reda said that one of the masked elements said «We killed you, infidel» and then stole all the contents of the house. The men told the family to leave Arish or also be killed.

Reda said the gunmen fled Obour without being stopped by security forces, even though the incident came one day after bombings and the killing of soldiers in Arish. She confirmed that her husband was killed only because he was a Copt. The burial ceremony was held at the Church of the Virgin in Rod al-Farag in Cairo. The family moved to live in Cairo.

**18. February 12, 2015:** At approximately 2 am, about 10 armed masked men stormed the house of Abdel-Shahid Tawfiq Azar, a plastic merchant. However, when he and his family heard the men firing their weapon outside his house in the Samran neighbourhood of Arish, they managed to escape through the back door. The masked men burned down the house.

**19. The terrorist organization Ansar Beit al-Maqdes announced the departure of 27 Coptic families from North Sinai.** The families sold their property in response to the organization's threats against Copts in Sinai. The threat contained an ultimatum to leave the border city, in accordance with orders the organization received from ISIS leaders. On the page «Province of Sinai,» the terrorist organization claimed that the deadline for its ultimatum was still in effect, and that it would not leave a single Copt in Sinai alive after the deadline, which was days away.<sup>1</sup>

**20. 23 February 2015:** Three masked men in a Toyota car shot and killed William Michel Farag, 53, as he went to open his knife-sharpening shop in a popular part of the Arish fish market in the center of the city. After failing to kidnap him, the gunmen fled from the area. His body was buried in his hometown of Mahalla al-Kubra.

Province of Sinai claimed responsibility for Farag's death on its official social media accounts, publishing photos of the Christian's body.

«Some decided to leave the governorate and travel to other governorates. Several families left the city because Copts were being targeted and are constantly being threatened. It has become easy for terrorists to enter the city. There are no police inside the city, since security forces are concentrated at checkpoints on the outskirts of the city,» said Fady William, Farag's son.

North Sinai Bishop Qazman said he did not think the situation was as bad as William portrayed, countering that Coptic families were not forced to leave Arish but chose to leave temporarily for fear of being targeted. The recent incidents affecting Coptic citizens do not represent a danger to all Copts, he said, because they target Muslims and Christians residing in Sinai alike. 2

Father Gabriel Ibrahim, Bishop Qazman's secretary, said that churches continue to carry out religious services but, not regularly and depending on the context, as per an agreement between the priests and the people. Ibrahim stated that the St. Mina and Pope Kyrillos Church in Masaïd and the Church of the Virgin Mary in Dahya are secured by security forces, who are exerting every effort to restore security to the governorate. «We, on our part, reiterate that we are not afraid and that we shall not give up our homeland or our churches, and that the Copts who left will return as soon as possible, when the situation stabilizes,» he said.

The coordinator of the «Copts of Egypt» alliance in North Sinai, Abanoub Girgis, said that about 27 Christian families left the governorate, amid the killings and kidnappings of Christians over the last months. «Some Christians living in the areas of Salam and Masaïd are subjected to the surveillance of their homes and workplaces, the aim of which is to target and kill or abduct them,» Girgis said.

«Many families have dissolved their business and sold their property to leave Egypt without planning to return, while some families are now looking for a way to leave, and others have applied for official leave from their government work.

«There is a missing link in the account of target attacks in Arish. There are ordinary people who frequent the city to ask about Copt's houses and places of work. They report this information to armed groups which in turn target Copts, whom they consider to be infidels,» Girgis said, pointing out that «the number of Coptic families present in Arish ranges from 200 to 300 families, and they pray in three churches, all of which do not have security guards.»

**21. 2 May 2, 2016:** Massak Nasrallah, 58, was killed after being asked about his religion. An armed group stopped Nasrallah's car as he was returning to Arish from work accompanied by his colleague Hamada Nagib, who works in the health directory in the Qasima neighbourhood of Hasna. The armed men asked him, «Are there any Christians in the car?» His colleagues replied that they were all Muslims and signalled to Massak to remain silent, and not declare that he was a Christian, but he refused and declared his religion. They took him out of the car and said, «You do not deserve to live. You are an infidel.» They then killed him. Nasrallah's body was buried in the family cemetery in Beheira Governorate, his family's home governorate.

**22. 30 June 2016:** A gunman shot and killed Father Raphael Moussa, a priest at St. George Church, while his car was being repaired in the Sad al-Wadi area in Arish. Moussa was shot three times, sustaining bullet wounds to his head and body. The security media center at the Interior Ministry published a statement documenting the killing: «On Thursday morning, while Father Rafael Moussa, a priest at St. George Church in Arish, was in the industrial zone of Arish sector II in North Sinai to repair his car, unknown gunmen opened fire in his direction, killing him. Security forces moved immediately to the scene and took legal action.» The spokesperson for Coptic Orthodox Church said that Moussa, 46, was born in Ismailia and was married with two children. In his statement on its official Facebook site, Ansar Beit al-Maqdes claimed responsibility for Moussa's death and vowed to carry out further terrorist operations in Sinai and beyond.

**23. 30 January 2017:** Three masked gunman shot and killed Wael Yousef Qaldes, 35, after storming his shop on 23 July Street in the center of Arish. Qaldes was shot six times, sustaining gunshot wounds to his head and abdomen. Qaldes was in his shop with his wife and one of his sons when the masked men entered. One of them grabbed the victim's wife before she could scream. Then they shot him. The masked men opened bottles of soft drinks and chips and ate them. Then they took the Qaldes' cell phone and the money that was in the shop before leaving.

**24. 12 February 2017:** Bahgat William Zager, 40, was shot and killed by gunman while driving his car in the Obour neighborhood, south of Arish, at 9 am, after being forcibly stopped at gunpoint. Zager sustained gunshot wounds to the head, neck, and abdomen. Originally from Alexandria, he lived in Dahya. The funeral ceremony was organized at St. George Church in Shatby, Alexandria.

**25. 12 February 2017:** Adel Shawqy, a 55-year-old day laborer, was killed after being shot in the head. Shawqy was a resident of the Samran neighborhood in Arish. Immediately after his death, his family fled to Assiut and lived with relatives before moving to Ismailia, joining the wave of Coptic migration from Arish.

In the second week of February, leaflets were distributed inciting violence against the Christians of Arish, demanding that they leave the city and threatening to target and kill them on the basis of their religious identity. A number of Copts found leaflets in front of their doors, while some received threatening messages on their personal phones. In testimonies provided to EIPR, a number of them reported that there was a list of 40 Christians who had been marked as targets.

**26. 16 February 2017:** Gamal Tawfik Girgis, 50, was shot in the head and killed while selling shoes in the Thursday market in Arish's Samran neighbourhood. Gamal worked as a teacher and sold shoes for additional income. His wife was with him when he was killed.

**27. 21 February 2017:** Armed men shot and killed Saad Hakim Hanna, 65, and his son Medhat, 45, inside their house, on Salman al-Farsi Street, in the Batal neighbourhood in Arish III police station circuit. They shot the two men, then set Medhat's body on fire.

**28. 23 February 2017:** Kamel Rauf Kamel Yousef, known as Kamel Abu Romany, 40, was killed inside his house by armed men in white jellabiyas. At 8:30 pm, the armed men stormed Romany's house and began firing at him in quick succession in front of his wife and five children. He owned a sanitary ware store in the circuit of Arish III police station. The men then set fire to the house and fled. Eyewitnesses said that Romany tried to escape, but they caught him and killed him. The funeral prayer was held in the city of Meet Ghamr, Daqahlia.

**29. 4 March 2017:** Unknown persons set fire to Munir Malak's house in the Shorbagy neighbourhood in Masaid. The house was empty, as its residents had fled the area before the incident.

**30. 12 March 2017:** A number of houses owned by Arish's Coptic Christians that were left empty when their owners fled the city in fear for their lives are subjected to theft and looting. Three houses owned by Adly Suleiman and Gamal Adly and Adly's son in the Safa district of Arish were looted. Adly Suleiman said that his neighbours told him they found his door open, and that the contents of the house were stolen. He stated that he went to the Ismailia police station and filed a complaint. The same thing happened to Gamal Adly, an employee of the St. George Church in Arish, where he received a call from his neighbours saying that his house had been stormed and looted.

1 Al-Bawaba: Ansar Beit al-Maqdes announces the departure of 27 Coptic families from North Sinai, 1 March 2015 <http://www.albawabhnews.com/1142248>

2 Copts United website: Will the terrorists succeed in emptying Sinai of Christians? 6 March 2015 <http://www.copts-united.com/Article.php?I=2195&A=192349>

## **Annex III: Sample of Testimonies Given to EIPR by Displaced Copts and Religious Authorities**

**Hany Samir Kamal**

I have lived in Arish for 33 years. My parents are both government employees. At present, my father is retired, and my mother still works. Before 25 January, life was good. It was OK. True, there was more interest in Sharm el-Sheikh, but Arish had security and safety and tourism. There were no problems between us and the locals. Nobody would tell us this is our country and you have to leave. I had a mobile phones shop where I worked, and I dealt with everybody in a normal way.

A few months after the revolution, everything that happened in the country happened to us. Security was no longer present. Religious fanaticism began to appear, but only a little. Also, Arish is close to the borders, so a lot of weapons were brought in. They wanted to destroy the country. Some Christians returned to their governorates and stayed there. The majority of them were from Upper Egypt.

During this period, there were ignorant people who would tell us, "You are Egyptians. What brought you here?" They would say, "You should be working for us. We should be telling you what to work in. Instead, you came and took jobs and opened shops."

After 3 July 2013, there was a gathering of the Rabea people close to Al-Nasr mosque. I saw them. Nothing happened. They wanted to take over the government.

Before that, incidents were only occasional. Every year or six months, something would happen, such as what happened to Mr. Magdy, the first person to be kidnapped. They asked for money, and then they slaughtered him. There was no response from the state. At the time, they had not become very visible, especially as Mohamed Morsi was ruling. They would say, "The country is ours. The highest post and officials are with us." When Morsi was removed, it was a great loss for them. They wanted to compensate for that and do to the president what was done to Morsi, especially that his return became a difficult matter.

They wanted to push the Christians out of Sinai. Then it would be easy to convince Muslims of their ideas. They are popular and have great influence. They can control the whole country.

Lately some people showed their real face. They have a propensity for fanaticism, which was hidden and then appeared. They used to say Morsi is returning to rule according to the Sharia of God.

By the end of January, I was out of Arish. I received the news that a man called Wael Yousef, who had a supermarket, was killed by masked men in front of his wife and children. They entered, covered his mouth and, after killing him, opened the fridge and drank cold soft drinks and ate biscuits and took some things, and then left. They wanted to send the message that we killed him and remained there drinking, not afraid.

The police arrived an hour later. They asked the people whether he had problems with anybody, and who his enemies were. Then they left, and we heard nothing from them again.

I stayed in another governorate, and, after the midterm holidays, they did not return. I went down to Arish, and after a few days I heard of the killing of Dr. Bahgat in the Obour district. I became worried because I am well known, and they could possibly come for us. Family and neighbours said, "Stay and we shall protect you." But when it gets serious whoever sees the weapons, runs and hides. Even the parents of our children's school friends told us, "Come stay with us, and we shall protect you." I told them, "I shall leave and don't know when I am coming back."

When the incidents escalated, my father was afraid. He had a car. I called him and told him, "I am not ready to walk in your funeral." On Friday he made use of the holiday, and the situation was calm, and he left Arish. We did not know that everybody came. An army force protected my family until they left the neighbourhood where we live. If we had stayed, we would have been dead by now. My father left with some simple furniture in a half truck. He coordinated with somebody in the Evangelical church who communicated with us. People were sharing the phone number of the person responsible there.

We might return when things calm down, but this will not happen. If the police were capable, they would have protected themselves.

### **Samia Nader**

Before the revolution, every year someone would be killed, like Father Mina. But during the last two weeks, four were killed. They burned houses. People were afraid and fled. Now, after the killing was in the streets and shops, they come to our homes. The situation is difficult, and the terrorists have a complete database of all the Christians, where they live, the number of their children and all their movements. They have their spies that follow people, know when they leave their homes. They picked them gradually one after the other. They know their homes and cars. They have information.

Two weeks ago, the governor said we shall be given a month leave. Submit a request of transfer and we shall sign it. I submitted a request as well as a request to transfer my son from school. Women were moving, and the men were staying at home because the terrorists were killing men and leaving the women.

I left my home with its furniture and told my Muslim neighbours to look after it and to inform us if it gets burned.

### **Samir Gerges**

The city was safe and beautiful. We loved it more than you can imagine. For two years, we began to see strange things and harassment. There was something strange in the city, something alien. There was a split in dealings, in the style of life. Of course, there are still loving and loyal people. I escaped by the help of God and my friend, Haj Mohamed, who was with us [when I escaped].

During the recent period, incidents of killing Christians were repeated and in a horrible way. When we heard about these incidents, in the beginning, I insisted to stay on. My life is no dearer than the lives of those who were martyred from the army and police and Christians. But then Haj Mohamed and other Muslim friends insisted that I leave town. They were afraid for us. Also my

family insisted that we leave Arish for fear for our lives. I left all my fortune in Arish, as well as my shop of construction material. I worked hard to set it up and operate it. I took out loans for the building and the shop in it.

During the time of [former Interior Minister] Habib al-Adly, the situation was very safe. Work was OK. Everything was working. Arish had a fundamentalist minority in light of its tribal nature. Some of them were Muslim Brotherhood. But their numbers increased after people were displaced from Rafah and Sheikh Zuwayed to Arish. They walked in the midst of their people. They spread among the people. I don't know which direction the blow came from?

A week after the martyrdom of Father Mina Aboud, I was threatened. Two masked men told me to close the shop and leave. "You are wanted today. You and along with you Shady the owner of the cafeteria must leave now." I told one of the masked men, "I just returned from travel and I don't have money." He then got 2,000 EGP out of his pockets. Another one with him said, "Finish him off. We could use that money." The man who gave me the money said, "Adel had done me a favor, and he is a good man, and he asked me to leave now." He told me, "Take yourself and leave. If we do not execute you, there will be others who will come and do that." He said, "We shall wait for you by the house. We know everything about you." He took me. We took the wife of Abu Shady and his son. They followed us. Then, he warmly shook hands with me and left. I left the city for four months. I left everything and stayed in Ezbet al-Nakhl in Cairo. I went to the police and filed a complaint, but I did not feel there was any use. They said they needed proof.

I stayed for a while in Ezbet al-Nakhl but then returned because there was no work. I wanted to return to my work and look after the shop and house.

When I returned, Muslim friends told me, "Take care Adel. Some people came and asked if you had returned. Take care of yourself."

The threats increased lately and I decided to leave, especially since people will not be able to do anything. If I knew of an armed person or a terrorist, I would not be able to report him because a few hours later I would see them coming to burn the house. So even if my neighbour knows something, he will not be able to do anything about it. That explains why citizens do not interfere in killing incidents. Everybody is afraid.

I hope to return to Arish. All I have is there. All my fortune is there, but the return is difficult, especially after the threats and our name being included on the rumoured list of 40 names that distributed on the doorsteps. We demand the protection of our property and our ability to transfer it, as well as being provided with a place where we can live and work to sustain our livelihood.

### **Wife of Medhat Hakim and mother of his son Saad**

On Tuesday, at 10.30, they knocked at the door. My son opened the door. Masked men walked in two steps and shot him down. I went to see what was going on. They threw me out through the door of the flat. They searched the flat. They found my elderly husband. They shot him twice, once in his ear and the other in his head. After that, they took the mobiles and the gold from my hand, set fire to the body of my son and then to the house. The neighbours were in a state of panic. They saw the fire and the shooting, and they informed the police. They came an hour later and took me to the police station, where I stayed until 5 in the morning. In less than a month, eight people died. Everybody deserted Arish and left. They want to expel Christians from Arish.



On Thursday, we went to receive the bodies. My son-in-law looked for a place to bury them in Qantara Sharq in Ismailia, because we have no cemetery in Arish. But he didn't find any [place]. We sought out a relative in Suez who provided us with a burial place.

### **Ayad Megally**

We are very tired. We saw death with our own eyes and received direct threats, papers thrown beneath our houses, leaflets that say, "If you do not leave within 24 hours, we shall kill you." We didn't manage to collect our things from the house and left everything and our work when we heard that one after the other was being killed. We took our clothes and our children and left.

The terrorists are taking one area after another. They entered Al-Samraa and Al-Safa and will begin to enter Al-Dahya.

The neighbours are sympathetic and some people are ready to sacrifice themselves [for our sake]. We want a place to live. I am now displaced inside Egypt. This is very difficult for us.

The same thing happened two years ago when they killed Father Raphael in a horrible manner. They killed a man and burned the man and his son and his home.

How do you think we feel when we collect our clothes from our homes and leave? I do not believe that security will return. I am not optimistic and if I find stability in Ismailia, I shall settle there. Security here is totally absent. Sometimes we seek the help of the police. They tell us, first, we have to know how to protect ourselves. They don't know how to protect themselves.

The man was killed in the Thursday market and nobody intervened. The police came and went as if they were just watching like any citizen. When we left Arish, the driver covered his face with a kafeya for fear he might be killed with us. If explosions take place right next to the checkpoints, what do you think will happen to us when we are so targeted?

After they finish off the Christians, they will start with the expatriates. They want it as an Islamic Emirate.

### **Haj Ahmed Metwally**

The performance of the police is inadequate. They are not able to control the situation in general. Unfortunately, in Arish, they are present in a strange way, a routine way: too many useless checkpoints. Of course, there are difficulties because they are fighting something that is invisible. They must be light in their movement and able to get information, and none of this is happening now. The terrorists know everything about the residents. Their brains are working well. But the security is imposing something like a collective punishment. The terrorists are like a phantom. We know nothing about them. And of course most of the people are either sympathetic toward them or angry toward security's conduct or scared of the terrorists. The terrorists and the tribes know everything about us, and we know nothing about them. They have abilities that are not easy to acquire. They know the names of all those coming from Egypt [i.e., from outside Sinai] and the names of all Christians, their places of work and where they live. We know nothing about them.

All the government's action sends you the message to leave. We can't find anything to eat. Most

goods and needs are prevented from entry. What can we work with? All their behaviour indicated we should leave here. The army brought the Ministry of Interior inside the city. The Arish police's maltreatment of residents, especially the women, made the local residents uncooperative with the police, angry with them. This situation provided an opportunity for the thugs and terrorists to spread out and work.

We live in a difficult situation. Life has stopped. Trade is in a state of death. We can't live.

In those recent events, terrorism aims to incite sectarian strife and show the police to be weak. They distributed leaflets to threaten people and sent threats on mobile phones. If I were a Christian and watched someone being killed or slaughtered or his house burned, I would say, "I shall be next." By the way, after succeeding in expelling Christians, they, the Masraweya [from the rest of Egypt] will be next, so that they have the area all for themselves.

### **Nema Nabil, wife of victim Gamal Tawfik**

We arrived at the Thursday market at 6:30 am. We had some merchandise, slippers, socks, sport shoes, that we sell and live off its revenue. Two masked men came to us. One of them spoke to my husband: "Are you Gamal?"

He said, "Yes." He thought he was from the government because he was carrying a gun. Immediately he shot him in the head and said anybody coming near here will be shot. After that, he took Gamal's phone, his ID, the money in his wallet and all the papers in it. People in the market ran and hid. Somebody called an ambulance, which arrived half an hour later and said that Gamal was dead. We had the funeral in Asyut, because we have no burial places in Arish.

Before the incident, we were living, and there were no threats against us. Had we been threatened, we would have left Arish. We have lived there for 28 years. We are originally from Asyut. I have six children. May God help my raise them.

### **Saad Moussa**

I moved to Arish with my appointment there in 1979. I was head of personnel in a governmental department. It was the most beautiful of places. Discrimination existed, but not like now. There would be, for example, difficulties in finding a job for your son. Also, when they call for you, they say "You Christian" or "the Christian has done this or that." A few times, they drew crosses on the house. We are careful in our dealings and careful to keep religion out of it.

During the time of Morsi, they drew the Quran and a sword on the door of my house. I filed a complaint (no. 5) at Arish police station, and when I deleted the drawing, they burned part of the house. Some police informers came, but they could not find anything.

After Sisi's election, they began to say you are followers of Sisi. You brought him. Let us see what good he will do you. I avoided entering into discussions of politics or religion. I only went to work and returned home. I knew that the reaction would not be fair to me.

On Friday, 1 February, I heard the sheikh in the Mostafa Mosque behind Arish general hospital praying against the Christians and Jews in the Friday sermon. He incited against them. My wife

prevented me from filing a complaint against him.

After the repetition of the killing incidents and it getting closer to our residence in the Zohour neighbourhood, I thought it was our turn. The bishop himself was being taken around in an armoured vehicle when he wants to move. My situation, as an ordinary person, is difficult and nobody is concerned about us. Everybody is shirking the responsibility. Neither security, nor the governor, nor the church moved. I decided to take my family and my three children and leave.

Some people called me Thursday evening from the Evangelical church and told me, "Come you will find flats to live and assistance. I fled on Friday at 3 am. I left in the dark, in my car, with the women of the house carrying only their clothes. We found four families had left. We passed through four checkpoints. Driving through the last checkpoint, the guard asked about the reason for which we are leaving. He told me to open the car trunk. He asked, "Are you travelling?"

I replied, "I am fleeing." He asked from what? I said, "Fleeing from the terrorists."

I arrived at the Evangelical church and waited until sunset. They brought us tea and food and said, "Go to the Orthodox church in Mostaqbel city." The people at the Orthodox Church were indifferent. They left us in the cold until we arrived at the youth hostel here.

I want to confirm that the governor, the security director and Bishop Qazman did not bother about us in the beginning. They are afraid for their positions. The killing and the threats are going on, and they come out and say everything is quiet and calm. If people had not fled to Ismailia and if the media had not showed interest in our issue, nobody would have cared.

### **Maged Shokry**

The army was inside the city and left it for the police. They could not control the situation. Yesterday, they entered the house of my in-law. It has three floors. They destroyed the flats and wanted to kill him in Karam Abu Negila, but he had left the house beforehand. The police are inefficient and scared of them, and they said this is not our concern.

We are from the Seifin family, present in Arish since 1920. Even when Israel occupied Sinai, we remained and did not leave. The situation was good before the revolution and the security was enforcing its control. But the terrorism appeared after 25 January. The situation changed and we saw the Brotherhood and Salafis and people saying you are a Christian and walk away and don't deal with you or sit next to you.

### **Ramadan Metwally**

The governor is non-existent. He walks surrounded by guards and armoured vehicles, but there is no concern for the needs and problems of people. The day Saad Hakim was killed and his son burned, none of them was there. The police make checkpoints and, at 4 pm, drive for a while in their tanks and then the streets are empty. The streets of Arish at night have neither lights, nor lampposts.

Our Christian brethren are leaving Arish because their children are killed. That is why we told them to leave, because they will kill you and there is neither security nor any official who can help. Chil-

dren stopped going to school. We have to speak out because we are leaving our country [city] and moving away because some youth are killing us. My son is afraid to go to school or to his lesson.

### **Mary Zaki**

We fled from Arish to Ismailia on Wednesday, 22 February, at night. We were afraid after the targeting and killing of Christians almost on a daily basis, in broad daylight and in the middle of public places and in their homes. My husband had a shop where he worked. But he closed it two years ago, because of the bad security condition in Arish. We have a private car, which he turned into a taxi and used to drive people around.

We were living and staying in the midst of the bombing, but when the targeting became as it is now and on a daily basis, and they began to come up to our houses at any time, killing and slaughtering, and the police did not do anything, nor was anybody arrested, we decided we had no more energy to endure. We moved, carrying only the clothes we were wearing, and arrived in Ismailia.

After recent attacks, we felt the targeting of my husband was easy. So he stopped working, and we left for Ismailia.

The following day, after we arrived in Ismailia, my neighbours in the building told me, "Some people came and asked about your husband, using his full name." Thank God we fled before that happened.

We need a place to live and work and for our children to go to school. It is good they hosted us in the youth hostel, but that is only a temporary solution. We need help to begin our lives here.

Even if they tell us the world is safe there. Return to Arish. How could we return? Are words enough to make us feel safe after we have seen with our own eyes the killing and the slaughter of Christians in plain daylight in Arish? More important than officials saying that the situation is safe is that we actually feel this safety they are talking about. Only then shall we return to our homes. It is important that I, as a human being, feel safe, am able to move freely without fear. But what we have seen, what we have been through, this is not safety. This is not a life.

### **Salwa Adel**

All that trouble, we have seen more than two years ago. But after the 30 June revolution, it increased. There are now abductions and threats and killings. We came to Ismailia recently, before the recent successive acts of killing and targeting of Christians in Arish. Violence, murder and terrorism have been present for several years, but they did not come to the homes in this way. In recent incidents, they reached homes, slaughtered people and stole and burned houses. We saw people getting killed in front of their homes or at their workplace or even in the market at midday, about 5 meters away from an army tank. Where is the safety and security that some officials are talking about?

I have lived in Arish for 35 years of my life. It was the most beautiful city in Egypt. I never thought to leave it or live somewhere else. My entire world is here. We were settled in our life and work and everything. But now, I left my flat and all our property there and fled to Ismailia, hoping for the safety we have missed in recent years and missed even more during last month.

### **Marina Magdi**

It is the extreme fear that drove me to leave Arish, and leave my home and all that I worked for there. I was afraid for the children. We left carrying only the clothes we were wearing. I don't know what the future will bring, whether we shall return again to our home and life there.

My colleagues at work told me to wear a headscarf while I am on the street, so that terrorists do not identify me as a Christian. I refused. But I used to be scared walking on the street on my way to work, looking behind me all the time. With the recent events, it was the men who were targeted by Daesh. They killed men and young men and left the women.

The media portrayed us as terrified and scared. Maybe this will encourage terrorists more and make them feel secure that we would never return to our homes again. It could make them think they have succeeded in their plans, and that they have evicted us from Arish forever.

### **George Mehanna (child)**

Lately, I no longer play on the street with my friends because of the threats. My mother prohibited me and my brothers from going down to the street, even if we wanted to buy something and not just play. She used to walk us to school herself, and then come pick us up. I didn't see the street, nor went out to play with my friends and sometimes I skipped school.

I am afraid to return to Arish again, because if the terrorists know I am there, I might die. Also, I frequently heard the sound of explosions, so much that my room would shake, and, at one time, the window glass broke.

I so wanted to bring all my toys along with me. Father did not agree. He said there is no time and we should not take much luggage with us.

### **Wafaa Kamel**

We came fleeing terrorism and the killing of Copts. I have been living in Arish since 1984. But the killing of Christians began after the revolution. It happened at long intervals, maybe one or two incidents a year. But since the 30th of January, the situation became difficult and worse: violence and killing and targeting and theft and burning of Copts constantly.

They entered houses and killed and burned. Of course, we were full of fear and it increased every day, especially that the terrorists have lists with our full information, our full names and where every member of the family is working and the working hours and their paths from and to work and mobile phone numbers.

Those last two weeks we remained awake 24 hours every day. Our men would stay up guarding the house at night and tell us to go sleep with the children. But who could have fallen asleep? In the mornings, the men would sleep, and we and the children would be awake guarding them. It was a difficult life and could not continue like this.

### **Magda Morcos**

Our house is close to the Matafi checkpoint. We have lived in the area for a long time. The checkpoint was set up close to us. When terrorist incidents began recurring close to the checkpoint, I asked my husband to move, but he refused. He said, "I lived my whole life defending my country, and I won't come now and flee from my home because of fear of death." The eve of the feast, I was in the bathroom. I heard the sound of a huge explosion. I kept calling for Ateya, but he did not reply. I ran with such heaviness in my heart. I found the whole house had collapsed, and he was sleeping in the living room. I hadn't yet seen the blood. I ran to get a bottle of water and tried to make him drink. I found he was dead.

After the incidents, I lived with my eldest daughter, until we fled to Ismailia after the many incidents of killing. How unfair is this, that the Copts, pay for everything that is happening in the country, we get slaughtered and there is nobody to protect us? Even security cannot protect us. The final result is that we are forcibly displaced leaving our homes and our lands.

### **Moheb Girgis (65)**

I know no other place but Arish. I was born in Sinai and lived there and have never left it before. I have been present in Sinai since 1970. At the time, it was Al-Qantara Sharq. There was no north and south. I was born in 1947, and, after the October war, Al-Qantara became administratively affiliated with Ismailia. I have lived in Arish since 1979.

My house is close to the Holfaa checkpoint. Every day, there is an explosion. We can't sleep through the night because of the sound of explosions. My children wake up every night in panic and keep screaming. Once, the window glass fell, and the children woke up screaming and repeating: "Father, we are dying."

The killing of Copts in Arish is not new. It happened a lot before. But this time, it is violent and more than at any previous time. Seven martyred in two weeks. And the way they are killed differs from before. They began attacking homes, kill whomever they find in them and then burn them. I couldn't sleep throughout last week to guard my children. When we met the governor, he told us, "If you want to leave, I shall give you a month vacation, and whoever wants to leave Arish, we shall help him out." We left because we were being killed all the time.

### **Ayman Khamis, 36, plumber**

I am married and live in the neighbourhood of Masaid in Arish. After the abduction of Gamal Fakhry, the owner of the plumbing shop, in 2011 and the demand for a large ransom, when I saw him after his release, beaten and tortured, I felt concerned and afraid for the future. My car was stolen in February 2015, a Chevrolet, carrying plate no. 9381 or 83. My brother was driving it. He was stopped by masked men in the suburbs of Masaid and the car was taken away from him at gunpoint. The following day we met in an area close to one of the checkpoints. We told the security. Their reply was that we should not come close to that area during curfew, so that we would not hit by the showers of bullets by forces present there. After the end of the curfew, they didn't find the car. It appeared again a year later in an operation used by a terrorist to attack the checkpoint.

I left Arish with my family and the family of my brother. We left everything: the house, the sanitary ware shop, the plumbing workshop, the storehouse. We left on Friday, 25 February, in the morning. We went to the Sharqiya Governorate and stayed with relatives there. When we heard that displaced Arish residents were gathering in Ismailia, I came with my family, but my brother stayed in Sharqiya.

### **Amany Boulos**

Honestly, there is no way to adapt with the people in Arish, because of the hand [i.e. the tattooed cross], the hijab or the head cover. Since the revolution, we heard some words from people we do not know while walking on the street, words such as: “dress modestly” or “wear the hijab” or “don’t wear tight slacks,” and sometimes from some colleagues at school, as if joking.

There is no security presence inside the city of Arish. With the increasing violence and threats, I stayed at home and left work about two weeks ago. I was afraid of getting hurt. Once, I was walking on the street. Suddenly a taxi stopped by my side and a man came out of the taxi. When he put his hand in his pocket, I was scared and ran, although all he wanted was to get out the fare to pay the taxi.

We left Arish because we are afraid, especially my brother. He is 18 years old and always goes out and stays out late with his friends. He didn’t want to leave Arish, but we pressured him, until he agreed. We left Friday night.

I am engaged to a colleague of mine at school, an administrative coordinator. We had planned to get married in the summer. Now, I don’t know what will happen, especially since my fiancée left his work at the school in Arish and the apartment he had prepared for us, for which he had paid all he had.

### **Ishaq Hanna, blacksmith**

I have lived in Arish for 22 years. I was afraid for those with me [my family]. I have a daughter in the final school year. They came to my workshop. They drew the cross on the gate to the workshop and asked about me three times: “Where is the Copt working here?” When I asked the neighbours what they looked like they said they had long beards. People were sympathetic. They told me to erase the cross. Then I closed the workshop.

But when they killed my in-law about 9 months ago, and after the death of Father Raphael, I decided that I must leave. I closed the workshop permanently, because I had thought that it was a temporary situation. But the killing of eight people in one month made us decide to leave. We have no life here at all in Arish, and the government did not stand by us, even though I have no source of income after closing the workshop.

### **Father Sarafim, bishop of Ismailia**

Families began to arrive from Arish on Friday morning. But we knew two days earlier that some people were coming, and we began to prepare ourselves on Friday morning. As soon as the families

arrived, they went to Father Antonios's church in El-Mostaqbal. Some church communities began looking for flats to accommodate them. By the end of the day and after a few phone calls with officials, they opened the youth hostel in Ismailia and accommodated a large number of families, and the ministry of social solidarity sent a group to Mostaqbal City and another group to Al-Qantara Sharq.

We are trying to accommodate families in coordination with the state. The problem is that the numbers are increasing, and how long will they stay? This is the first time that we have had this kind of problem. They are afraid for themselves, but if they find safety and if the threats stop, they will return.

We formed a committee to receive the families, follow up on the situation, and evaluate the extent of the problem. The committee is formed of the secretary to the governor and representatives from the social solidarity and education and health and other directorates. It also includes Father Yousef, the coordinator of the committee, which is also gathering basic information before taking action.

I also want to note that nobody organized the departure of the families, and the church did not tell them to leave or leave their city and life. There are still families in Arish who live in safe areas such as Masaid and Dahya, but most problems are at the outskirts of the city.

These are displaced Christian families. That is why they came to us. These are our children. As soon as the governorate realized the extent of the problem, it formed a committee with the governor and it has Father Yousef as a member to coordinate communication with them and solve problems. And the state said they will help in everything. We help and coordinate with the state.

### **Christian Pator from Arish**

Arish had between 500 to 550 Coptic families. In general, the suffering of Egyptians in North Sinai is great, especially after the revolution: closure of roads, long waiting at checkpoints and difficulties in accessing life essentials.

For a Christian minority, the suffering is doubled. We cannot overlook the role of the Armed Forces and police and the efforts made, and we cannot underestimate the incredible efforts made in a difficult area. There is no neglect in protecting churches during feasts, and the movements of the bishop are always guarded and secured. But a man who received threats went to report them to security. He told him, "You are not safe, and I am not safe. You are threatened, and I am threatened," and this gives a bad impression.

This happens parallel to the unfortunate events. For example, they took the elderly woman out and killed her elderly husband and his son and burned the body of the son. The mother was wishing to be killed, but they do not kill women. And if this happens in a house behind where I live, of course, I shall leave. Some families left with nothing except the clothes they were wearing.

The number of displaced reached 45 families, 20 to Cairo and about 15 in various governorates.

There are areas from which many people have left, and they have become empty of Copts. We used to pray on Friday and the father said we shall continue to pray and will not close the church.

There are two cases in one day: Mr. Kamel Abu Romany – they entered his house with his family present. They asked about him and his son. The father tried to escape and climbed to the roof.



They killed him and set fire to the house. Unfortunately, we suffer from slow procedures. For example, the bodies would lie in the morgue while the families wait perhaps up to two days until criminal investigators arrive. This slowness in procedure increases the suffering more.

We are also deprived of having funerals because the security situation does not allow it. We are forced to pray for the dead in the morgue and in other places. Copts, in general, do not have any cemeteries in North Sinai. The place we used to bury our dead has become an area of sandy hills. Before the revolution, we used to bring tractors to remove the sand on the way to the graveyard. But after the revolution, the whole area was covered with sand, and it is difficult to reach the graves.

### **Father Ezzat Afify, pastor of the Evangelical church in Ismailia**

Our role in the past was to receive people and provide accommodation in collaboration with other bodies. But the intervention by the state encouraged this tendency and residents left Arish to Ismailia after crossing the Suez Canal through the Qantara Road. They were in a state of terror and panic throughout their journey. This state will be temporary for these people, and I hope that people can soon return to their homes, friends, work and schools.

In Ismailia, we set up a team, for which sister Iman was responsible, to receive the families from Arish and coordinate between the churches to sustain communication with families there.

About a week ago, families began to think of migration, and they contacted brethren in Ismailia, who tried to help them. The numbers began to increase since Friday morning, and, on Sunday morning, everything was secured after providing places for residence and livelihood. All kinds of support were available, and we are waiting for the school problem to be solved temporarily until people can return to their homes. I hope that will be soon. We try to assure people of that.

### **Shokry Seif**

We heard that the Evangelical Church in Ismailia was helping people and accommodating them. I asked and got the phone number of a person called Mina. I called him, and he said, "If you want to come, come." I thought I would go to my church in Arish and tell them. Maybe they could help, but neither Bishop Qazman, nor the fathers did anything. He said, "Whoever wants to leave is free to go."

Before that and after the repeated incidents of killing on the streets and in homes, security did not do anything, as if there was no targeting of Christians. All I can say to officials is, "Feel for us. Protect us. We are very exhausted."

### **Priest from Arish**

A large number of Christians came to live in Arish after the liberation of Sinai and its return to Egypt's sovereignty. But there are a number of families who had lived here for about 100 years, and had not left even during the occupation by Israel. The majority works in government jobs and skilled jobs and trade.

The oldest church in North Sinai is the church of ... It has been here since 1920. During the Israeli occupation, there lived a monk named Father Abdel Nour. It was affiliated to the Jerusalem diocese for Orthodox Copts. After the death of Jerusalem Bishop Bassilios in 1996, Pope Shenuda appointed Father Makkari to be the bishop of Sinai, When Father Makkari died, Pope Shenuda divided the diocese into two in 2000, the first in North Sinai headed by Father Qazman and the other in South Sinai.

There is an unused graveyard that cannot be used because it is covered with sand dunes. Also, it is close to security checkpoints, and it is difficult to reach. After the revolution, people stopped going to that area. We requested more than once that an area be designated for burial in Bir al-Abd, but this did not happen. That is why people bury their dead in governorates where they have family.

The security and economic situation in Arish is very difficult. Our Muslim brethren also want to leave the city, not only because of the absence of security, but also because there is no work. Even the Christians, before they left, had no work. There is no selling or buying. Those are people who live from one day to the next. It is difficult for them to endure this situation for long.

As soon as people migrated to Ismailia, the state focused there and provided apartments as temporary residences. But in other governorates, officials met the people and made promises that they did not fulfil.

Still, matters are not clear. To some people they say this is a temporary situation. But at the same time, people have transferred their children from schools and universities. Some have transferred their work. There must be a plan to deal with the situation as a whole.

## Annex IV: Development of armed violence in Sinai

### A history of armed and violent groups in Sinai:

The roots and manifestations of armed violence in Sinai date back to before the 25 January 2011 revolution. Between 2004 and 2006, Sinai witnessed a wave of bombings in tourist cities targeting Egyptians and Israeli tourists. There were three major events during this timeframe: the Taba and Nuweiba bombings in October 2004, the Sharm el-Sheikh bombing in July 2005,<sup>1</sup> and the Dahab bombing in April 2006. Combined, the bombings killed more than 120 people and wounded about 320 others.<sup>2</sup>

However, the situation changed after January 2011, in light of the confusion or the significant laxity in security that followed. Some jihadist movements had exploited these unstable security conditions to increase armament and recruit more individuals. This applies to the case of the Tawhid wal-Jihad group, which were thought to be responsible for the three major bombings between 2004 and 2006.<sup>3</sup> It was thought the group became dormant after 2006, however it soon re-emerged under a new organizational framework in 2011 as Ansar Beit al-Maqdes.

The history of Tawhid wal-Jihad dates back to the beginning of the millennium in the north of Sinai, when it was founded by dentist Khaled Mosaed. Known as Abu Suhaib al-Maqdisi, he was following in the footsteps of Abu Musab al-Zarkawy, the founder of Tawhid wal-Jihad in the land of Euphrates (Iraq). Khalid, the group's emir, was killed in a security crackdown in 2005.<sup>4</sup>

However, the roots of the group were not uprooted by the security operation, as it continued operating despite its apparent latency after carrying out the 2006 Dahab bombing. The connection between Tawhid wal-Jihad and Ansar Beit al-Maqdes was confirmed through one of the organization's visual releases titled «Harvest of Men of Arms» on 2 September 2015.

Ansar Beit al-Maqdes, which adopted the name Province of Sinai after it declared allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Daesh) in November 2014, is considered the largest armed organization in Egypt in terms of quality of operations, as well as impact, measured by the group's dozens of victims who mainly consist of members of the Armed Forces and police.<sup>5</sup>

The shift in the strategy of the group's objectives came following the ouster of former President Mohamed Morsi. The president's ouster was followed by the group's most violent operation, known as the second massacre of Rafah. In August 2013, Ansar Beit al-Maqdes militants attacked a bus carrying military recruits. This contradicted their earlier rhetoric, which emphasized Israel as a target while reiterating that they were not targeting Egyptian military and police. This was also contrary to the first Rafah operation – in which 16 soldiers were killed, two armoured vehicles were seized, and there was an attempted infiltration of the Egyptian-Israeli border – which no party claimed responsibility for. This is in addition to the abduction of seven soldiers under the rule of former President Mohamed Morsi May 16, 2013, which no group claimed responsibility for. However, Ansar Beit al-Maqdes published a video, after the second massacre of Rafah, showing soldiers thanking the Salafi Jihadists in Sinai for mediating their release.

To this end, Ansar Beit al-Maqdes had carried out several attacks against Israeli targets, including a rocket attack on Resort Eilat on 20 January 2014.

The most important operations for which the group claimed responsibility are:

- An assassination attempt on former Minister of Interior Mohamed Ibrahim, 5 September 2013.
- Bombing of South Sinai Security Directorate, 7 October 2013.
- Bombing of Military Intelligence Department headquarters in Ismailia, 19 October 2013.
- Bombing of Daqahlia security directorate, 24 December 2013.
- Bombing of Cairo security directorate, 24 January 24 2014.
- Downing of a military helicopter in Sinai, 25 January 2014.
- Assassination of General Mohamed al-Said, the director of the technical office of the minister of interior, 28 January 2014.
- Attack on Karm al-Qawadis checkpoint, 24 October 2014.
- Bombing of Battalion 101 in Arish, 29 January 2015.
- Downing of a Russian commercial flight, 31 October 2015.
- Bombing of St. Peter and St. Paul Church, 11 December 2016.

#### **From targeting Israel to targeting Christians in Egypt:**

The nature of the Ansar Beit al-Maqdes organization's targets has changed. They were initially limited to targeting Israel and everything that might be in its interests, including the repeated attacks on the Egypt-Israeli gas pipeline. However, with the ouster of Morsi and the death of hundreds of demonstrators considered affiliated with Islamist currents that supported Morsi, the organization shifted, for the first time, to targeting members of the military and police. The first operation that bespeaks this change in nature and for which the group claimed responsibility was the second Rafah massacre on August 19, 2013, in which 25 Central Security Forces recruits were killed. The rhetoric of the group justified its shift to repudiating the military and police by saying that it was these bodies that had initiated the targeting of the «peaceful and vulnerable,» and therefore the organization had to respond to force with force. Some of the organization's publications at the time carried names such as «Wars of Vengeance for the Muslims of Egypt,» which referred to the attempted assassination of former Interior Minister General Mohamed Ibrahim on 5 September 2013, as well as the bombing of the South Sinai Security Directorate on 7 October 2013.

In any event, from that time on, the organization changed from Salafi Jihadism to a Takfir organization, but its accusations of apostasy were limited to the regime and not the entire society. The rhetoric of the organization, as expressed in its various statements and through publications attributed to it, stressed that it would not target civilians, but only members of the Armed Forces and police.

However, more than three years into this transformation, the organization escalated its targeting of Christians in Sinai, a trajectory that culminated in claiming responsibility for the St. Peter and St. Paul Church bombing in Abbasia in the heart of Cairo on 11 December 2016. This followed the transformation of the organization toward more radical ends, evidenced by its decision to declare loyalty and allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in November 2014. From that

point onward, the organization has launched attacks and attempted assassinations of civilians it has classified as «agents of the Zionist army and the army of apostasy of Egypt.» Later, the organization heightened the restrictions it imposed on Sufis in Sheikh Zuwayed and Rafah and beheaded a Sufi elder. On 28 March 2017, the organization issued a new visual releases, «Nour al-Shariah,» highlighting its practices within the framework of the so-called «management of Hisba within the organization,» which include intercepting and confiscating large quantities of drugs and cigarettes that were being smuggled across the border, burning the products, flogging the smugglers, and destroying a large number of television sets and smoke plants.

This transformation reflects the furthest stage the organization has reached so far, in its attempts to impose its control on society and enforce its system of laws, which was reflected in the release. The group denigrated the Egyptian legal system, showing photos of the Supreme Constitutional Court, the Supreme Judicial Court and some of the most famous judges and media personnel, who had allowed «the spread of evil and covered up great sins,» partaking in a system the came from the «infidel West.»

All of this reflects a greater danger to civilians, whether those reporting militants' movements to the military, or Sufis and Christians, especially in those in the Province of Sinai's main strongholds in areas and villages south of Sheikh Zuwayed and Rafah. The scope of influence recently extended to threaten Arish, representing a very dangerous development, despite the greater concentration of security in the city compared to the rest of North Sinai.