



Egyptian Initiative  
for Personal Rights



# FROM DISPLACEMENT TO ISOLATION

One Year After the Forcible Displacement of Arish Copts

# **From Displacement to Isolation**

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

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### **Acknowledgements**

This report was written by Ishak Ibrahim, researcher and officer with EIPR's freedom of religion and belief file. Karoline Kamel and Patrick George conducted and transcribed the interviews with victims included in the report. Amr Abd al-Rahman, the director of the civil liberties unit, edited the report, and Ahmed al-Shebini was responsible for copyediting.

## Introductio

It has been one year since Coptic citizens were displaced from Arish amid violent attacks that targeted many inside their homes. The violence spurred an exodus from the city as Copts fled the killing, leaving behind everything they owned and going to several nearby governorates or regions where they had relatives. At the time, state institutions denied that this exodus was displacement. In statements, Minister of Social Solidarity, Ghada Wali said that the displaced persons would return to Arish in two or three days, demonstrating a lack of understanding of the magnitude of the crisis, which was later reflected in state interventions to ensure justice or restitution for the victims.

In this report, “From Displacement to Isolation: One Year after the Forcible Displacement of Arish Copts,” the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights documents the living conditions of displaced Copts, looking at any assistance offered by state institutions and whether any genuine measures have been taken to realize justice and provide restitution to these citizens. To coincide with the report, the EIPR also released a short film including the testimonies of victims from their current places of residence in the governorates of Ismailiya, Cairo, and Giza. The EIPR offers the report and film footage to both official institutions and civil society to encourage them to assume their responsibility for bringing justice, holding those responsible to account, and providing reparations to the victims.

Earlier, in May 2017, the EIPR issued a report, “A Death Foretold: An Analytical Report on the Killing and Displacement of Arish Copts.” That report examined incidents over a six-year period up until the last week of February 2017 in which Copts in North Sinai were publicly targeted. Forms of intimidation ranged from the prohibition of worship, the burning of churches, attacks on property, and abductions for ransom to forced displacement and identity-based killings.

By the end of January 2017, Copts were being targeted with increasing frequency. Six incidents were documented that resulted in the murder of seven Copts. The spate of killings began on January 30 with Wael Youssef Qaldas, who was killed in broad daylight in his shop on July 23 Street, a major thoroughfare in downtown Arish. They ended with the death of Kamel Raouf Kamel, known as Kamel Abu Roumani, on February 23. The attacks were notable for their extreme violence: Copts were targeted in their homes, some of the bodies were burned, and their homes were looted before being torched. The victims came from several different neighbourhoods. The perpetrators of the attacks also took the victims’ mobile phones, which gave them ready access to a database of names and telephone numbers of other Christians in the city.

In its previous report, the EIPR stated that events in Arish could only be considered in light of Egyptian legal and constitutional principles or international norms accepted by the state and sanctioned as legally binding. Additionally, the events could only be described as forced displacement carried out by militias or paramilitary groups against a religiously homogeneous group with the objective of removing them from their homes. The process should not be dismissed as voluntary departure or a collective flight from armed conflict. The EIPR also noted that security and local authorities’ actions during this crisis failed to meet their constitutional, legal, and international obligations to protect the fundamental rights of Egyptian citizens in this area, most importantly the

right to life, property rights, and the right not to be forcibly displaced. Moreover, the long time-frame over which the events unfolded allowed ample opportunity to anticipate and effectively plan interventions to provide protection.

This latest report, “From Displacement to Isolation! A Year after the Forced Displacement of Arish Copts”, is divided into two parts. The first examines the conditions of the very few Christians who remain in Arish, the attacks that have occurred since the mass displacement through the end of February 2018, and the living conditions of Copts displaced in other regions. Part two analyses the interventions of government bodies aimed at ensuring justice and identifying the perpetrators of the attacks, providing restitution in the form of compensation commensurate with the harm sustained by the victims, and, prior to this, adhering to disclosure standards by recognizing the magnitude of the problem and taking the necessary actions to mitigate this harm.

For this report, the EIPR relied on documented attacks on Copts still residing in Arish; interviews filmed by EIPR researchers with several displaced families in Suez, Cairo, and Giza governorates; and dozens of televised statements and interviews with victims and religious and executive officials.

The EIPR found that:

- A year after the displacement, the security situation remains unstable and Christians lack even a minimum level of protection. The displaced families are unable to return to Arish. Some people who decided to return were targeted and in some cases even killed by masked men.
- Since state officials failed to accurately describe the crisis, no clear legal framework exists to regulate the treatment of victims and subsequent actions of security and executive officials. The systematic displacement of Copts has been treated as a one-off event that will pass in a matter days when the displaced return to their homes, which has not yet happened.
- Actions by executive officials and administrative leadership during the displacement were influenced by the media uproar surrounding the families’ displacement. The government therefore supported some displaced families with housing and living assistance, but it failed to devise an integrated plan to deal with the crisis. The displaced were treated like charity recipients rather than citizens deserving appropriate compensation for their property, integration into new communities, and jobs to guarantee a dignified life.
- The lack of an integrated plan also meant that victims received different treatment depending on the governorate to which they moved. Some governors issued decrees offering monthly stipends to cover the cost of rent, others provided apartments to be used as temporary residences, and others ignored the victims entirely.
- Although a year has passed, the authorities have released no information about the state of investigations. Have the parties, whether groups or individuals, inciting and committing these crimes been identified? Have the investigating bodies surveyed the scene of the targeted attacks? Were parties arrested in connection with these attacks? The lack of answers to these questions raises doubts about the ability of institutions of justice to do their duty to investigate, summon and question suspects and defendants, and refer them to trial in the competent court.



## Current Situation of Copts in North Sinai

Christians have had a presence in North Sinai for decades. Many Christian families have been born, lived, and died in Sinai. Arish saw an influx of families in the 1970s and 80s coming to take up government jobs in the state bureaucracy or to work in trades and commerce. Prior to the displacement in February 2017, church sources estimated that there were some 450 Christian families in Arish, 20 in Rafah, 4 in Sheikh Zuwayd, and 40 in the Bir al-Abd district, as well as a small number of civil servants in the districts of al-Hasana and Nekhel. Christians in Rafah and Sheikh Zuwayd began to leave in 2012 and 2013 after some members of the community were targeted and killed. Some of these families went to live near relatives in governorates in Upper Egypt and the Delta, while others moved to Arish before the wave of displacements in February 2017. Currently no Copts reside in Rafah and Sheikh Zuwayd, while in Arish, numbers have dwindled to about 30 individuals who live in secure areas and do not leave them. Worship services are held in one church while all other churches in the city are shuttered.

Archpriest Mikhail Anton, the priest of the Church of the Virgin in Arish, told EIPR,<sup>1</sup> “All that is left is some 30 individuals from seven or eight families, along with three priests at the bishopric to oversee rites at the Virgin Church at the seat of the bishopric. They all live in Dahiya next to the Arish bishopric, which is adjacent to the security directorate. That makes the situation safe there. All the remaining families live there and don’t leave the Dahiya area.”

Christians residing in Arish or those who have returned, as well as the property left by displaced Copts, have come under attack. This has raised further questions about their fate and the chances of displaced families returning to their homes.

Over the last year, two Copts who returned to Arish were killed. They found it difficult to make a living in the areas they had been displaced to and so returned to Arish to check on their property and reopen their shops.

- Nabil Saber Fawzy, 40, was shot by masked men on May 6, 2017. He had been displaced following the attacks in February 2017 and settled in Port Said governorate. He returned to Arish ten days before his death, reopening the barbershop he owned. On the day of the incident, an armed group opened fire on his shop, located in the Atef al-Sadat area near Dahiya, killing him.<sup>2</sup>
- Bassem Shehata Haraz was shot by three armed men at 9 pm on January 13, 2018 in the Thursday market area after the men inquired about his religion. The armed men stopped Bassem, his brother Osama Haraz, and a third person with them as they were on the way home. After seeing the cross tattoo on Bassem’s wrist, one of the men asked him, “You’re a Christian?” When he responded in the affirmative, they shot him in the head. Finding no mark on his brother’s hand indicating his religion, they threatened him before letting him

1- Several telephone interviews over the course of a year, the most recent on Feb. 15, 2018.

2- Interview with his family, May 12, 2017.

go. They asked the third person to leave when they ascertained that he was a Muslim.<sup>3</sup> Bassem Shehata's family had been displaced from Arish in February 2017. The family resided for a period in the al-Mostaqbal City housing project in the Ismailiya governorate before moving to Ezbat al-Nakhl in Cairo governorate looking for work. A few months earlier, the two brothers had decided to return to Arish to run their mobile phone repair shop.

The latest murders brings the number of Copts killed on the basis of their religious identity in North Sinai since the January 25 revolution to 16: three in 2013, two in 2015, two in 2016, eight in 2017, and one in 2018. All of them were directly targeted on the basis of their religion, whether inside their homes, in a public place, or on public transport. They were all shot and killed by masked men, which amounts to premeditated murder under the law.

The property of some displaced Copts was also attacked, either stolen or destroyed. This constitutes a violation of property rights and a breach of the state's constitutional and legal obligations. Some of these attacks include:

- March 4, 2017: unknown persons set fire to the home of Mounir Malak Ibrahim Salib, in the Shorbagi neighbourhood of Masaid. The house was empty, as the family had left the city prior to the incident.<sup>4</sup>
- March 12, 2017: the homes of several displaced Arish Copts were looted and robbed. Three homes in the al-Safa area were looted, belonging to Adly Suleiman, Gamal Adly, and Gamal Adly's son. Adly Suleiman said his neighbours informed him that they found the door of his house open and that all the appliances and items inside had been stolen. Suleiman went to the Ismailiya police station and filed an incident report.<sup>5</sup> The same thing happened to Gamal Adly, a worker at the Mar Girgis Church in Arish, who received a call from his neighbours telling him that his house had been broken into and robbed.
- January 2018: the home and warehouse of Makram Shenouda was robbed; he filed a police report at the Abu Sawir police station in the Ismailiya governorate.

There were also attempts to take over empty apartments belonging to displaced Copts. According to several statements, some local residents occupied these properties in an attempt to unlawfully claim them, prompting their owners to file official reports. In some cases, security forces intervened to expel the squatters, as noted in testimonies appended to this report.

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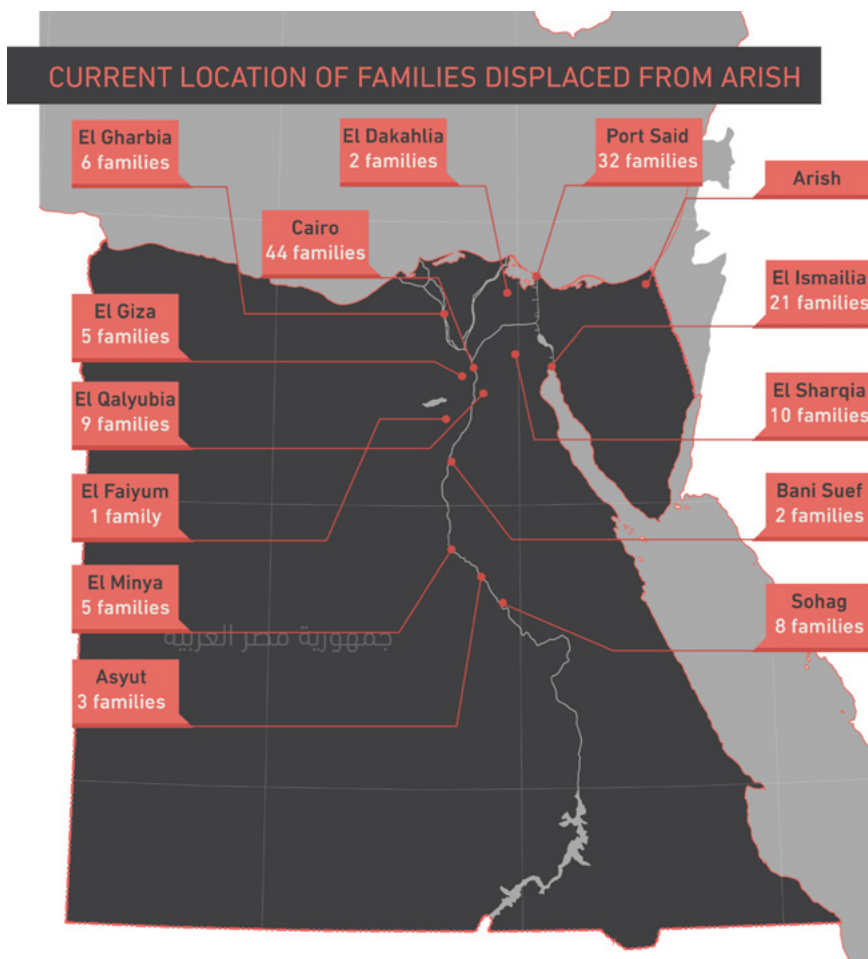
3- Telephone interview with Osama Haraz, Jan. 15, 2018. [Written Bassem in the Arabic]

4- EIPR has a copy of the official reports filed in connection with the fire.

5- Telephone interview with Adly Suleiman, Mar. 14, 2017.

## Status of Displaced Copts in Other Governorates

According to official figures released by the North Sinai Social Solidarity Directorate, 6 258 Coptic families left Arish for other governorates: 121 families in Ismailiya, 44 in Cairo , 12 in Daqahliya, 32 in Port Said, 3 in Asyut, 9 in Qalyubia, 5 in Minya, 5 in Giza, 1 in Fayyoun, 8 in Sohag, 10 in Sharqiya, 6 in Gharbiya, and 2 in Beni Soueif.



The EIPR, however, has obtained statements indicating that the actual number of displaced families is bigger than the number released by the Social Solidarity Directorate, though we were unable to confirm a precise number. For example, EIPR researchers found several displaced people living in the Alexandria governorate not listed in the official count. Some families also left Arish after the

6- Statement issued by the Directorate, Mar. 5, 2017.



ministry released its statement. Moreover, while the official statement says that only five families are residing in Giza, several local residents confirmed that the number exceeds 20 families.

Displaced families continue to face several economic and social problems and have difficulties adjusting to new living conditions, particularly as media coverage of their plight has subsided and state agencies have failed to keep their promises to meet their needs.

The nature and magnitude of problems varies from one governorate to the next, since state institutions have not dealt with the displaced in a uniform fashion. This has been reflected in the inequitable provision of assistance to victims and the lack of any fixed, clear standards to govern their treatment. EIPR researchers who conducted field visits to families in the governorates of Ismailiya, Cairo, and Giza observed that conditions for those in Ismailiya and families in the Muqattam area of Cairo are particularly bad; these families face severe distress and have no job opportunities. Families in the Giza governorate are relatively better off thanks to accommodations provided by the Giza governor, including facilitating changes in identity documents such as national ID cards, drivers licenses, and car registration, and easy school placement for children.

We review below the most significant problems encountered by the displaced.

## 1. Housing-related problems

This problem was addressed differently based on directives in each governorate. Some governorates, such as Ismailiya, where the greatest number of families displaced from Arish reside, provided alternative apartments. The displaced families were allocated several apartments in the Mubarak buildings in al-Mostaqbal City, which lies 10 km from the city entrance. A desert area with unpaved roads, it stands in total contrast to the open green spaces and tree-lined streets of Ismailiya, looking like a comparative desert-land.

The displaced families live in a quasi-ghetto, in an area known as “the Christians’ buildings.” A police checkpoint is stationed in front of several of the buildings, reflecting the fear many Arish Christians in Ismailiya experience. This is compounded by the fact that police prohibit strangers from entering this area, including street vendors or sellers of butane gas tanks. While the families laud these protective measures, they also complain of the difficulty of moving outside the area, which is not served by regular transport. They are thus forced to buy supplies and walk a long distance with them on unpaved roads, while children find it difficult to move between these isolated buildings.

The residents had several observations about the unsuitability of the housing in health and social terms. Standing pools of sewage impede access to the area by car or other transport method. Filth is abundant, attracting swarms of flies, mosquitoes, and insects, which impact the health of children especially. The apartments are sparsely furnished, with just a few beds and chairs. EIPR researchers observed the residents’ clothing piled up on chairs in some homes due to the lack of adequate storage for everyone living in one apartment.

Several people said that there are no registered contracts with official bodies clarifying the nature of their relationship with the place and their terms of residence. They were made to sign an official document stipulating that if the Ismailiya governorate, as the owner, asked them to leave the properties, they would evacuate immediately without any of the furnishings in the apartments, which are barely fit for living.

In contrast, in the Port Said governorate, the displaced people from Arish received no assistance in the early months of their displacement, before the governor allocated monthly cash stipends to cover rent. The same is true in other governorates to which Arish's Copts went. In several cases, they were left to face their predicament alone. Some went to live with family.

Rami Girgis, who resides in Port Said, told the EIPR:

"I preferred Port Said. I stayed in the scout camp. The governor told us he had a problem with housing and after many negotiations, we were given LE1,500 to rent an apartment. Nothing comes from the Ministry of Social Solidarity. I'm originally a social studies teacher. Now I work in Port Said in an administrative office, with a document from the North Sinai governor. We're a family of four. My last son was born in Port Said."

In general, the state of the homes visited by EIPR researchers in the governorates of Ismailiya, Cairo, and Giza reflected the anxiety of living in a temporary residence despite the passage of a year. Families were generally unable to purchase additional furnishings due to the lack of financial resources and attempted to adjust to what was provided.

## 2. Employment-related problems

Some Arish Copts worked in the state bureaucracy and in government departments of education, health, and supply. Another segment worked in commercial activities, as tradesmen, or as white-collar professionals such as doctors. Many government employees are involved in other commercial activities to supplement their income. With the attacks in January and February 2017, the displaced people left behind all their property in Arish. Many of them working in the state bureaucracy were able to transfer to their new places of residence or were exempted from attendance until the security situation improves. Those who worked in the private sector or had businesses or commercial interests, however, encountered problems finding jobs in their new areas of residence.

For example, during a field visit to al-Mostaqbal City in the middle of the day, EIPR researchers found most of the men were at home or sitting in groups in front of their buildings. When asked why they were there at what are ostensibly peak working hours, they gave a uniform response: there is no work for displaced Christians in Ismailiya.

The reasons varied. Some of the men were elderly and had reached retirement age as government employees in Arish, but they still worked at other jobs to earn an income to supplement their pensions. Younger men had worked as carpenters, plumbers, mechanics, or street vendors in the markets, while others drove a taxi or owned a small shop. These men did not have the money needed for a commercial venture. Moreover, jobs for them are scarce. Since their ID documents still listed their official address as Arish, they were treated as strangers and not necessarily trustworthy. Their problems extended beyond Ismailiya residents. Some administrative bodies also proved intransigent, refusing to make accommodations that would help them to work. For example, some taxi owners licensed to operate in Arish said that the administrative bodies refused to transfer their licenses to Ismailiya to enable them to work legally and earn the money needed to pay for the annual fees and licenses on their vehicles.

"So now you're coming to take a share of Ismailiya's livelihood?" said Samuel, who owns an Arish-licensed taxi and was unable to transfer the license to Ismailiya in the face of the local traffic department's refusal. "This was a sentence spoken by several officials, it wasn't just one person.

We're five families here who have service taxis—we call them metered taxis—and a microbus. We're licensed and pay taxes and insurance, and the cars are just sitting there. I wish we could run them, but the official tells us the license can't be changed, they don't have directives to do it."

### 3. Aid and Cash assistance

"We're begging so we can eat. We go knock on the church door and they tell us, there's no blessing (assistance) today, come back next week, come back next month. I mean, it's laudable that the church is doing what it can, but we're not the responsibility of the church. We're the responsibility of the state." So said one displaced Arish Copt.

During the peak of the crisis in February 2017, government officials made many promises of assistance, pledging to meet needs for adequate housing, jobs, and cash to help with living costs. Yet, this aid was temporary and linked to the circumstances of displacement—the need for housing or electrical appliances—and was not part of a comprehensive vision for dealing with this humanitarian crisis. As the crisis continued, with little chance that the displaced would return home in the near future, no comprehensive plans were drafted over the last year to suit the new status quo.

These were the findings of field visits and dozens of telephone interviews with displaced families, amid government silence about the rights of Coptic families displaced from Arish.

The families of victims of the attacks that led to the displacement received a lump sum of 10,000 EGP each. Compared to government assistance in other humanitarian cases, this sum prompted complaints and raised questions about discrimination against Coptic victims of terrorism in Arish. Other victims of terrorism have received sums of 100,000–200,000 EGP, as in the case of victims of attack on the Roda Mosque in Bir al-Abd in North Sinai.<sup>7</sup>

The wife of victim Bahgat William told EIPR:

"We only got 10,000 EGP from the Ministry of Social Solidarity. I'm staying in Ismailiya in an apartment. Circumstances are hard. I brought my furniture from Arish last July. We asked to be treated like the martyrs, those the government gives 100,000 EGP and a monthly pension of 1,500 EGP. I don't know why our situation is different. When the Roda Mosque incident happened, we heard that every martyr got 200,000 EGP, and we just got 10,000 EGP."

Overall, families agreed that the major problems they face are:

- Leaving Arish without any property save clothing and a few light belongings.
- The difficulty of adapting to new places, especially with temporary accommodation.
- Most men cannot find work, which means that families have no income to provide a dignified living.
- The geographic discrimination they encounter as Arish natives when applying for jobs or from neighbours.

7- Mohammed Hussein, "Ba'd shahrayn 'ala waqi'at masjid al-rawda istilam 205 min usar al-shuhada' ta'widat al-200 alf junayh," *al-Yom al-Sabia*, Jan. 23, 2018 (accessed: 27 March 2018). <https://goo.gl/kDJ6VB>

- Feelings of marginalization due to the state's disregard for their plight and officials' disinterest in following up and providing the assistance or compensation promised by the Ministry of Social Solidarity.
- The fear of losing their property in Arish in the absence of any indications of an imminent return, given the recurring targeting of Copts who did return to Arish.

According to testimonies to EIPR, no official from North Sinai has been in contact with the displaced families to discuss their fate and how to deal with their property. In addition, the interest of officials in the areas where they now reside has waned markedly. Some families have sent appeals to the prime minister and state officials, but no one has reached out to discuss their future or the problems they face.

A year after the displacement, the security situation in North Sinai remains unstable and Christians are not afforded a minimum level of protection. Displaced families have therefore been unable to return to Arish. When individuals did return, they were targeted and killed by masked men, as mentioned earlier. In statements, some displaced families told EIPR that they had no faith in the ability of state agencies to protect them if they returned. The way that security bodies treated the two killings that took place after the displacement was no different than incidents prior to the displacement: security agencies acted slowly and failed to take measures to protect people, giving the assailants the chance to flee the crime scene.

Under the Egyptian constitution and international human rights conventions, victims of human rights violations have the right to effective redress and restitution for violations of their right to a secure life and protection from forced displacement and attacks on their property. The responsibility for justice falls largely on state institutions, which are required to take effective action to ensure reparations on the basis of constitutional and legal rights.

There can be no restitution without clear action to ensure accountability for perpetrators and to prevent recurrences. There is thus no choice but to conduct investigations to discover the truth and identify those responsible for the attacks and hold them accountable.<sup>8</sup>

The UN General Assembly adopted a set of principles and guidelines on the right of remedy and reparation in Resolution 60/147 of December 16, 2005. The rights can be divided into three main categories:

- The right to know the truth
- The right to justice
- The right to restitution

The right to legal redress gives victims the right to know the truth, which requires the state to investigate human rights violations. The right to justice entails timely, effective remedies for human rights violations and obligates the state to combat impunity and bring the perpetrators to justice. The right to restitution comprises the first two rights but goes further, guaranteeing the right of compensation, restoration, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition of such violations.

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<sup>8</sup>- Abd al-Aziz Khanfousi, "al-Haqq fi-l-insaf wa jabr al-darar li-dahaya al-intihakat al-jasima li-huquq al-insan," 2013, <https://platform.almanhal.com/Details/Article/46780?ID=2-46780>.

By applying these principles to the Copts displaced from Arish, we find that state institutions were non-compliant. Instead they approached the issue from the logic of “aid” offered to the needy, rather than the logic of citizens’ rights and state obligations.

## 1. The right to know the truth

State institutions attempted to conceal the truth of the crisis and minimize the severity of the killing and displacement, and its impact on victims. The government refrained from describing the situation in legal terms that reflected the plight of the victims, who were forced to flee the area on their own following threats to Christians all over Egypt from the Islamic State (Daesh) and religiously motivated killings in Arish. The assailants also changed the method of attacks on Copts. Instead of killing them in the street, they began targeting victims in their homes, disfiguring the bodies, setting fire to the houses, and taking the victims’ mobile phones to obtain information about potential targets.

As the events unfolded, both the Egyptian government and the Orthodox Church rejected “forced displacement” as an appropriate term. The Interior Ministry denied that it had asked citizens to leave Arish, while in press statements the government and officials avoided “displacement,” instead referring to “the departure of Copts.” Gen. Yassin Taher, the governor of Ismailiya, said, “This isn’t displacement or a systematic dislocation as is frequently said. This is a matter of hospitality and the personal decision of some families.”<sup>9</sup>

Pope Tawadros II, in his sermon on March 1, 2017, said, “The expression ‘displacement’ that has been widely used in the media is utterly unacceptable. We live in this country, and its children in the armed forces, police, and state institutions, Coptic and Muslim Egyptians alike, are facing this violence.”

The Pope said that the events were simply a passing crisis: “With the good efforts of the state, the directives of the president, and the participation of all ministers in admitting our children in schools and universities and in alleviating the impact of this emergency crisis—I’m certain that these efforts, when they come to fruition, they will be able to return to the places they have chosen to live.”<sup>10</sup>

The EIPR considers what happened to be enforced displacement, which is unequivocally prohibited by the Egyptian constitution and, due to its gravity and the gravity of the ensuing violations, is not subject to a statute of limitation. Article 63 of the constitution states, “All forms and types of arbitrary forced displacement of citizens shall be prohibited. A violation of this shall be a crime not subject to statutory limitation.”

The failure of state institutions to accurately describe the crisis meant there was no clear legal framework to regulate the treatment of victims and subsequent interventions by security and executive officials. The displacement of Copts was therefore approached as a fleeting circumstance that

9- Statement made at a press conference attended by the chair and members of the parliamentary human rights committee, Mar. 2, 2017. The conference was held at the al-Qersh youth centre, a facility hosting displaced families.

10- Wednesday sermon, Mar. 1, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9Fq6nIZk9k>. [this video has been removed and there is no trace for it online. Clearly the church removed it]

would end when the displaced returned to their homes. This view was reflected in the statements of the minister of social solidarity when she met with displaced families at the Ismailiya youth hostel, demonstrating her lack of comprehension of the magnitude of the problem. After listening to the fears voiced by the displaced people, the minister said that the problem would be resolved in a matter of days: “These people will be back in their homes in a few days, quicker than you think.”<sup>11</sup>

This approach also meant that victims were treated differently depending on the governorate to which they moved. Some governors issued decrees providing monthly cash stipends to use to cover apartment rentals, while others provided apartments for temporary residence. Others ignored the victims entirely, demonstrating the absence of an integrated plan to deal with the victims in subsequent months.

Throughout the period of displacement and its aftermath, the governorate of North Sinai—the home of the displaced people and the location of their property—released no statements or information about the security situation or the governorate’s role in addressing citizens’ concerns about the possibility of returning, the fate of their property, and how to deal with it.

## 2. The right to justice

Although it has been more than a year since the religiously motivated murders and displacement, the investigating bodies have released no statements about the status of the investigation. Were the parties that incited to and committed these crimes, whether groups or individuals, identified? Were the investigating bodies able to survey the scene of the targeted attacks? Was anyone arrested in connection with the attacks? This raises questions about the ability of institutions of justice to do their duty to investigate, question and summon suspects and defendants, and refer defendants to the competent court.

To take one example, the EIPR obtained a copy of official correspondence in the investigation of a complaint filed by Mounir Malak Ibrahim, one of the displaced Copts whose home, located in the Shorbagi district of the Masaid area, was set on fire on March 3, 2017, after his displacement. Ibrahim reported the incident the following day at the police station in Ismailiya, where he currently resides, saying he had received phone calls from his neighbours that unknown parties had torched his home. The Public Prosecution, in report no. 340/2017 of March 13, 2017, asked the Arish police station to appoint criminal evidence experts to conduct the necessary survey of the fire scene. The North Sinai criminal evidence division responded:

In light of current security conditions and the difficulty of moving to the scene of the incident without security, two notices were sent to the Arish 3 police station, one on March 12, 2017 and another on March 13, 2017, to provide a secure means of transport and a security force to accompany the experts, to enable them to go to the scene of the incident to conduct the necessary survey pursuant to the Public Prosecution’s order. As of this writing, however, we have received no response, which has made it impossible to move to the scene of the incident and execute the prosecution’s order.

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<sup>11</sup> - Video footage of the minister’s meeting with several displaced families can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeWULH3SiKI>.



This indicates that the Public Prosecution and the criminal evidence division have not yet inspected the scene of the incident, determined the scope of damages, and gathered statements about the perpetrators, although the incident occurred amid media coverage of the displaced families and affirmations of state officials to protect their properties. This approach does not create an environment conducive to identifying and arresting the assailants.

### 3. Restitution by compensation to victims

Actions of executive officials and administrative leadership during the displacement were influenced by the media uproar surrounding the displaced families. The government did indeed provide housing to a segment of the displaced families and means of support to many of them, but it failed to devise an integrated plan for dealing with the crisis. The rights of the displaced were addressed on an ad-hoc basis of emergency aid, rather than by granting them compensation commensurate with their property, reintegrating them into new communities, and providing jobs to ensure a dignified life.

Although the provision of housing was a positive step, it is insufficient without subsidiary guarantees, such as housing appropriate for a dignified, secure life that guarantees privacy and allows for stable family and social relations. In this sense, the right to housing goes beyond making a physical space available to ensuring that the economic, social, and cultural rights associated with housing can be enjoyed.

Numerous statements to EIPR confirmed that state assistance was short term and limited to the provision of a temporary residence. Families were thus forced to seek monthly aid from churches in their districts, which also later stopped. State institutions did not respond to requests for assistance in finding work and overcoming difficulties, especially given the trying economic and social circumstances that all Egyptians are experiencing. In fact, some displaced citizens complained of the intransigence of administrative bodies when they attempted to find work. As noted above, officials in some governorates, such as Ismailiya, refused to transfer Arish-based taxi licenses to the new jurisdiction.

We made several findings based on this review:

- A year after the displacement, the security situation remains unstable and Christians, both the minority still residing in Arish and the displaced majority, are not afforded a minimum level of protection. The displaced families are therefore unable to return to Arish, and in some cases those who decided to return were targeted and killed by masked men.
- Since state officials failed to accurately and realistically describe the crisis, no clear legal framework exists to regulate the treatment of victims and the subsequent actions of security and executive officials. The systematic displacement of Copts has been treated as one-off event that will pass in a matter days when the displaced return to their homes, which has not yet happened.
- Actions by executive officials and administrative leadership during the displacement were influenced by the media uproar surrounding the families' displacement. The government did support some displaced families with housing and assistance for a substantial portion,

but it failed to devise an integrated plan for dealing with the crisis. The displaced were treated like emergency aid recipients rather than citizens deserving appropriate compensation for their property, integration into new communities, and jobs to guarantee a dignified life.

- The lack of an integrated plan also meant that victims received different treatment depending on the governorate to which they moved. Some governors issued decrees offering monthly stipends to cover the cost of rent, others provided apartments for temporary residences, and others ignored the victims entirely.
- Although a year has passed since the spate of religiously motivated killings and displacement, the investigating authorities have released no information about the state of investigations. Have the parties inciting and committing these crimes been identified, whether groups or individuals? Have the investigating bodies surveyed the scene of the targeted attacks? Were parties arrested in connection with these attacks? The lack of answers to these questions raises doubts about the ability of institutions of justice to do their duty to investigate, summon and question suspects and defendants, and refer them to trial in the competent court.

## **The EIPR recommends:**

- Forming a joint compensation committee of representatives of the government and affected families, tasked with maintaining contact with the displaced families and determining compensation commensurate with the value of the property of those who wish to dispose of it and not return to Arish. The committee should also grant assistance to ensure a dignified life to those who wish to keep their property while removing obstacles to the access of government services and providing jobs to the displaced near their places of residence.
- Acting with transparency: the investigating bodies should release their findings, identify the persons responsible for these attacks, and bring them to justice.

## Selected Testimonies from Christians Displaced from Arish

### Makram Shenouda, Ismailiya governorate

It's been a year since we left our businesses, our things, our homes, and our enterprises, and we don't know who to talk to. I sent telegrams to the president, the prime minister, and all agencies hoping someone would respond, but no one has so far. We've got so many problems: young people are out of work, there are people on pensions. We get 1,200 EGP a month which isn't enough for anything. We wait for Mr. Osama [the church aid official] and he hasn't come for two months. There are kids in schools, universities, institutes, and colleges who are really suffering. My neighbour has three kids in college and he gets 1,200 EGP. What can that do? And he's on a pension and is sick. We've got a lot of problems.

There's a real problem for five families here that own service taxis—we call them metered taxis—and a microbus. We're licensed and we pay taxes and insurance, and the cars are just sitting there. I wish we could run them, but the official tells us the license can't be changed, they don't have directives to do it. I've sent [complaints] to the presidency, the governor, the interior minister, and the prime minister, and they get put in a drawer—I hope in a drawer and not the trash. I wish someone would hear us. The governor doesn't come and no one else checks up on us. There are many things with the housing, like the lack of sanitation. The sewage is overflowing and all the kids are being hurt by it...

I contacted the governorate several times with no response. The second thing is all our young people, every one, was working in a company or cement factory, but now there's no work for them. We're asking for a decent monthly stipend or compensation for damages. I had a warehouse on the ground floor of my building. It was robbed a month and a half ago. I filed a report at Abu Sawir, but of course I don't have the number...

At the time of the displacement we left with the clothes on our backs, we have nothing. To be honest, the governor received us well in the beginning and then it was total neglect. Social services met with us and gave us apartments, a furnished apartment. Life here is hard for the young people and families. I mean, it's zero. We're begging so we can eat. We go knock on the church door and they tell us, there's no blessing today, come back next week, come back next month. I mean, good for the church for doing what it can, but we're not the responsibility of the church. We're the responsibility of the state.

Anybody who goes to check on his things in Arish—they're lying in wait for us to kill us. Exactly a month ago, Bassem, our son, he couldn't find work here so he went back to Arish. They shot and killed him...As for the future, there's nothing. We don't have a registered address to take out a loan or anything to start something new...What fault of it is ours that the good and bad people got mixed up? At least they could arrange the business with the cars. Look, here's a guy with a kid and he owns a car. We sent faxes and telegrams to the prime minister and everywhere else, but no one answered. No one asks about us. We don't even have the money for the fax. I swear I just

asked him for 20 EGP for the fax and there's been a death in his family and they're upset. Our circumstances are hard...

As for the prosecution, there's no prosecution or investigation into the incident or anything. They just give compensation of 20,000 EGP, 10,000 EGP from the governorate and 10,000 EGP from social affairs, to the family of the deceased.

## Farouq Salama, Ismailiya governorate

I lived in a large apartment I owned with all the amenities: two refrigerators, two washers, two televisions. I worked at the notary office in the financial division of the Ministry of Justice in the court complex in Arish, in North Sinai. What can I say about my current situation? I'm living in one room and a living room. The people here in Ismailiya took advantage of us when they found we were looking for an apartment. Come and take this apartment here, they said, this one's 1,200 EGP with an elevator and 1,400 EGP with stairs, and my pension is small and won't cover it.

In Arish, everyone liked me. I served people. I'd walk in the street [and hear], Uncle Farouq, Uncle Farouq. After what happened [the targeted attacks], everyone was afraid of me. Why? They were afraid I'd walk by a shop and it would be shot up. People were afraid to interact with us. After liking us, they started to be afraid. Some families would interact with us, but in their homes, not out on the street. They'd say they were too afraid to go out. Then later we cut down on everything. We wouldn't leave Dahiya, only to go to the market and for personal needs, nothing more than that. The Masaid area was off limits, the Safa area was off limits...We were imprisoned.

We left with the clothes on our backs. We didn't have time to take anything. I got my wife and left. They told us there was youth housing here, and Father Yulius, the services' bishop, and Father Quzman from North Sinai did the social services application for us. Everyone would get an apartment and a job. But nothing happened. I only got assistance of 1,000 EGP, they said it was from Pope Tawadros. I went to the governorate and the social solidarity department, but no luck. No ministers spoke with us or people from any government agency.

I wish I could go back to Arish. It's been my home for 48 years. My father worked for the railroad. He worked on the railroad (he said this visibly moved). I lived there and married there, my kids grew up there. Dina's studying economics and political science, Dalia's at the American University, Vivian has an MA in science. There's the honourable judge—I won't say his name—and my wife is in education. We're prominent people, not just anyone. And there are Coptic families in Arish who are doctors, engineers, and more. Even the tradespeople are big, they're of a certain level. And then a day comes when I give him 400 EGP. He's begging. A man from al-Safa or Masaid is begging and you give him 400 EGP? Why? Just so he can get a little bread, food, and drink. People here are living a tragedy.

My biggest dream is to return to Arish. Here we're not living in our own property, and it's exhausting. Thank God we're doing okay. But the church didn't help us. I also went to [Minister of Social Solidarity] Dr. Ghada Wali in her office and knocked on the door there. No one responded or followed up with me. I went to the Cathedral, to Gen. Nabil and the Pope's secretary, and no one responded...We have martyrs who were shot. The most any family got was 15,000 EGP. So these people are ready for a delegate to come and talk to them, I've got their addresses. Meanwhile, Dr. Ghada paid 100,000–200,000 EGP to martyrs in other places.

## Boqtor Dimyan, Ismailiya governorate

I'm originally from Qena. I've been in Arish 27 years. God was good to me and so I found a job there in 1990. I retired in 2008, because I was getting on in years. I worked 18 years at that job. My wife worked in the education department and also took retirement a while back. I've got a son and five daughters. One of them died, one of them married, and one got a degree. When this disaster happened, we were at risk. When we found people leaving, that everyone had left, we left with them. They brought us to Ismailiya to the evangelical church and then to the army hotel, where we stayed for 20 days, and then to the Mubarak buildings. They told us it was temporary, so we came and had a look. They said there was money coming for us, but we haven't seen a thing. They just brought us here and we haven't seen a thing. Only the church helps us out, but not regularly.

## Mina Sobhy, Ismailiya governorate

When we first came, we went to the youth hostel then to the al-Qersh camp, publicly owned facilities. Then the state provided apartments, not to own. They put us together in five buildings, like they're hosting guests. We're guests of the state or the governorate. We signed a security contract on the apartment and the things in it. We pledged to leave everything if we leave the apartment, taking only our personal belongings. We don't own anything in the apartment, the state's putting us up here as guests until this whole story is over or the war in Sinai ends...

I've got many problems. The first is work. I'm working on something that isn't mine. I have a taxi in North Sinai, but of course here it can't operate. The situation in Ismailiya is totally different. We spoke to the governor, but he said no, we're guests, and he can't get me an Ismailiya taxi license. So now I work in something else, but even so I still have to pay insurance and taxes every year on the car, which is just sitting there. I work as a night guard. This is our biggest problem, us as young people. We can't find work. Many people are just sitting at home. The second problem is we have no friends or anyone. In Sinai we have friends and loved ones, so if someone is going through a crisis, he can go to his friend or something. Here the world is closed in, there's nothing, but thank God...

As for the future, there's no future. No stability, no future. You're not stable, there's no future. You don't have a home—at any time you might be told to leave. If I have to leave, where will I take my wife and kids? What if I want to open a business? How when I don't have a steady residence? Even a very small business, with 8,000 EGP or 10,000 EGP? If they told me to get out, where would I go? I don't have furniture, I don't own anything, just the clothes we took. We'd just have to leave, if the state told me that's it, you guys have overstayed your welcome, time to go. I don't have furnishings or money. No one among us owns anything, no one has money to buy furniture. So where would I take my wife and daughter? There's no future. I'm a guy who isn't a civil servant. I don't mean anything by that, I'm not resentful of civil servants, but I'm a day worker and there are a lot of day workers. My wife is a housewife. What will we spend and how will we eat? With the work I'm doing as a night guard at a shop?...My car is my capital, it's what I make my living from, and its parked down below, and just like private cars, I've got to pay insurance and taxes on it...

My cousin died, Nabil Saber. The last one who died, Bassem Haraz, is my wife's brother. I can't go back now because of the killing and ambushes that anyone who returns faces, like Bassem. Here, to go work for someone, you need to have personal acquaintances. As soon as they find out we're from Arish, they think, oh these people are really hard up—sorry, but if they'd pay 2,000 EGP or 3,000 EGP, but they give us 1,000 EGP. The highest salary here is 1,200 EGP or 1,300 EGP at



private firms. Can you run a household on that? There's no work. Bassem was having a hard time and said he wouldn't just sit around here and we only get whatever God wills. Bassem went back and didn't last more than three months. Every time things calms down in this country and we say we're going back, something happens to put us back at square one...

I can't do anything with my house in Arish. I can't go get anything from it or sell it. I can't even commission someone to sell it. If they know we're Copts, they'll offer you 20,000 EGP or 10,000 EGP when it's worth 100,000 EGP. I know people who had to sell their houses dirt cheap, but at the beginning of the crisis, they managed to do it early. They sold and left...I can't get anything. My cousin, Nabil Saber, didn't last three days before they assassinated him right in his house...He had a barbershop and they shot him in the middle of his house. He was going to get his and his children's documents for school and he didn't make it three days before they shot him...Here they wanted the papers from the kids' schools there. He was in Port Said. He hadn't received an apartment, they were staying at the youth hostel in one room and things were bad for him...To make a long story short, we were tossed aside and forgotten, we're like refugees. Our Muslim brothers in Rafah were compensated and they have their cars.

## Umm Milad, Ismailiya governorate

I have six boys, four of them are married and they're sitting at home. I also have Mariam, who's getting married. I want to prepare her trousseau but I can't. I've asked for help from a lot from people and they say sure, but no one brings me anything...My life here is so, so hard. There I'd go out and work and make a living for me and my kids. Here I don't know anyone. My situation is very difficult, and it's all out of my hands. I'd rather make things by my own hand than stretch it out to anyone. I like to make a living by the sweat of my brow and work, but this is out of my hands...Even the house I'm living in isn't mine. My house in Arish—I built it myself, it's 400 meters. I married off all my sons, I'm the one who provided the bridegrooms' household. My ear is hurting me but I don't want to tell anyone because of the circumstances...I've gone back to Arish three times. The last time they stopped me. I started feeling bad on the road and they wouldn't let me pass. Once they stopped me at a checkpoint and started asking for IDs. It was like something alarmed me, and God forgive me, I hid my ID and told him I didn't have it with me. They killed a lot of Christians the night they shot Haitham. He [pointing to husband. I think this should be pointing at son? Or referring to son? This is based on my reading of the rest of the testimony below. In either case, some bracket needs to be introduced to say who Haitham is because this is all very confusing] was next to him. I was afraid for him so I went and got him and came here... We have more than 11 people who've been killed. My kids here are day labourers moving sand, cement, and bricks. If they don't find anything, they sit at home.

Believe me, God knows, I go to the market for food, people give me donations, I can't help it...In Arish, I worked and made a living, but this came all at once, God keep you safe...Glory to God, I praise God and thank him for his blessing, for getting me and my kids out safe.

[About her son] From the time he came, since the day of what happened to Haitham, I haven't let him go out. Just yesterday he was tearing at his clothes—I can show you the clothes—because he needs money and he'll go back to Arish. I cried and wailed. He wants to leave, he went and borrowed money from people. He wants to go back because he can't work here. When he needs money, I go out and get it...There he was an employee, I'm scared for him...God knows, it's been a month and he hasn't brought in a penny, and he wants cigarettes every day. And every time I go

out, he asks me where and I tell him, to buy something and to stay here until I get back. When I give him money and he asks, I tell him God sent it, and then when he exhausted me with his questions, I told him that I'd asked for it. He told me not to do it again. Sometimes when he isn't here, I go get food for the kids.

My son who's studying engineering—that costs money, a lot. When he finds work, he works, when he doesn't, he asks me where I'm going. I tell him I'm going to church, but, God forgive me, I'm not going to church, I'm going to get them food.

## Mounir Malek Ibrahim, Giza governorate

I was born in Upper Egypt, in Malawi. I left in 1982 when I got work in Sinai in Arish. I worked as a middle-school teacher. I moved up until I became the general director in the Education Directorate. Every now and then, I'd go to my hometown to see my family and attend to a few things.

This isn't the first displacement, it's the third. We got threats before, during the revolution. We left and spent two months in another governorate. When Morsi was in power, we stayed out of Arish another two months. I received many written threats, telling me to leave within 24 hours. I notified the security directorate and they told me it was probably just a friend playing a prank, or that the number didn't answer. They were numbers [from phones] sold on the street and no one knows who owns them.

I received threats. When the crisis got really bad in late 2016, William was shot in his shop and Dr. Bahgat was shot in front of his pharmacy. When we saw that the crisis would reach us and people were getting killed and their homes burned while they were inside, all of us were forced to take their kids and leave.

On March 2, they set fire to my land. I filed a report, because we had left in mid-February. We left Arish on February 13. There was a villa built on the land, there were business in, digital chick hatcheries. I've even got the customs receipt, hatcheries. I had started a business because I'm on a pension and a pension isn't enough for anyone. I started projects to support myself. They torched three hatcheries big enough for 5,000 eggs. I had 15 m<sup>2</sup> of timber scaffolding and construction materials. All of that's gone.

I had a bee project with 100 hives. They set fire to it, plus spare parts and accessories for my car. I had an office with photocopying machines—my son repairs them. All of that was burned. These were enterprises that brought in some income, but now after I was on top, I'm at the very bottom and I'll start from scratch. How? Is my life long enough for that? And when I tell someone, they say, don't worry, God will compensate you.

When I filed the report, the chief at the Masaid station called me and said, threateningly, Are you going to withdraw your complaint or what? I asked him what would happen if I didn't, and he said he wouldn't protect the rest of my property. So it's coercion. I've filed reports about the fire and the theft of my car, and now I'm living on God's bounty. They took whatever I own, even my clothes there, right now I can't go or send someone.

Now here I'm renting a place and it's very expensive. The pension I get doesn't cover the rent. Second, the state doesn't want to recognize that we've been displaced, I don't know why.

The Giza governor should be lauded. Every six months, he gives us 4,000 EGP. He got us a refrigerator, washer, stove, and three beds from the Risala foundation. He did what he could and didn't fall short with us. But the state is falling short.

We learned they gave apartments to people in Ismailiya, but not here. They gave apartments to people in Alexandria and Port Said. They got them apartments and furnished them and set them up in the apartments. When things are better, the apartments will go back to the state.

Honestly, I chose Cairo because I couldn't stand Ismailiya. Here I'm close to family, even though nobody gives anyone a thing and no one asks about anyone.

I stayed in Ismailiya for 22 days. In the end, I found it all a big hassle, I wasn't comfortable with the people there. I thought I'd go to Cairo, live at my own expense, and not be hassled at the end of my days.

If things keep up like this, what's coming will be worse. The government needs to take steps, not just one step. We've been displaced. They need to look at us differently than they do now. Like this, we're marginalized or forgotten. Next, they need to compensate us for our property there. How come the people in Rafah were compensated for their property and trees and everything?

Why don't they want to compensate me? It's not right and it's unjust. Why don't they compensate me? They could trade with me, see the area of the land there and give me the equivalent here. Am I not a citizen? I don't have any rights in the state? Didn't I do my military service? When I was a civil servant, didn't they take taxes from me? Why? Isn't Egypt my country, my nation? Did I come from abroad? I didn't. I'm Egyptian just like anyone else, like Abd al-Masih and like Mohammed and Ahmed.

If the prosecutor went out there [to my property], he'd be killed, the same way police and military officers are killed. Even if the prosecution was negligent, it's not their fault. If they go, it will be covertly to do investigations. They did the investigations from the office.

When we first came, the Ministry of Social Solidarity told us we'd get a grant to spend. That was in March 2017. We went and they gave us 300 EGP. The mountain gave birth to a mouse of 300 EGP. I told the employee there, what can I do with this? He told me to hurry up and spend them. What? Does he think I'm at death's door that I need to hurry up to spend them? That's what I got, that's what the state's got to offer.

There are people who aren't needy and the state pays for insurance, compensation, and big pensions, and they don't deserve it. In 1967, the people of Arish were displaced and went to Cairo. They were compensated and given houses. They were given assistance and their kids educated. Here, no one asks about us.

In the end, the supply cards run out, so we can't even get bread. We go and buy a round of bread for 50 piastres. The pension doesn't even cover the cost of bread. What? Are they trying to push us into thievery? We don't know how to steal, and it's a shame for a man with my status to steal or stretch out his hand. That's our situation, and it keeps getting worse. If it keeps up like this, we'll die of hunger, because I'm spending the savings I'd kept for emergency situations.

So 230 EGP is deducted from my pension for health insurance, but it isn't there. I go the hospital and it's like I'm begging and I get treated like dirt. A person has pride and so I say, that's it, I'm not going. I'm thinking of asking insurance not to deduct the payment because I don't get anything out of it, and that's my right.

The Giza governor took care of all the kids' school papers. He called North Sinai to get the kids' papers and they were faxed to us, but social services hasn't given us anything for the kids' education and schools. They make us pay all the fees, just like any student.

We went to the church to request a meeting with the Giza bishop and they told us at the information desk that he wouldn't meet with anyone. They told us we wouldn't get a thing. The church didn't provide anything. That's pure nonsense. The card for health treatment that we got from the cathedral means I get treated in the worst way at hospitals, it's a worthless piece of paper.

## Raymond Mounir Malek, Giza governorate

I've lived in North Sinai since 1990. My wife has been with me there since 2006. We left Arish several times, but this time is different. At the beginning, people in the street were targeted, but now they're targeted at home, the way they've recently killed people in their homes and shops. We left Arish and came to stay in Cairo, and things settled down.

In 2015, when Uncle William Michel, who used to sharpen knives at the fish market there, was targeted, we went to al-Qantara and stayed there a while. But this time is harder because they're coming to my house and killing me there, burning down my house. Why should I stay around and wait?

Some people were kidnapped in Arish and we paid a ransom. My apartment was broken into twice and I was car-jacked. I was driving when the takfiris came up behind me in cars without plates, around March 14, 2013. They cut me off and got out with guns. They came after me in broad daylight.

One day I went out to start the car and I found a note on it telling me, Leave, infidel, and my phone number was written on it.

There are lots of fine people there in Arish, and people call and check up on us. But we know people here who learned that thugs had taken over their apartments and told them they'd squat in them. They called the chief of the investigations bureau in Arish. He was respectable man and called the chief of investigations at the 3rd station and they got the guy who had broken into the apartment and dealt with him according to the law. The guy who did it was a neighbour. This is just one thing.

I lived in a busy area in front of the Sinai Radio building. They tried to rob my apartment twice. Once the terrorists went to the roof of the building where I live and broke into the apartment upstairs. They were firing at the radio building from there. I live on the fifth floor and heard the sound of them moving around. There were more than 40 of them, and if they'd come downstairs they could have finished us off.

For me, it doesn't matter, but it's a pity for my kids. We saw the people setting up tribunals. The takfiris would set up a trial in the middle of a main street for a half hour without anyone saying there was something happening, and then the sentence would be carried out in the street. Once we were walking and came across a closed area because the takfiris had set up a tribunal. My Muslim neighbours are watching after my things and my house. Once some takfiris came asking about us and they told them they didn't know where we were. We're only a small number there.

There's no more than 600 Christian families in Arish, we're spread all over the republic. Of course, everyone knows who works where and where they go. I don't want to go back to Arish now and I won't go back until the Egyptian army and President Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi tell us there's no more terrorism in Sinai. But if anyone else says there's no terrorism, I won't believe him. Father Quzman said there's no terrorism and people went back and died, like Uncle Nabil and Bassem Haraz, who went back and was shot.

My wife is from Ismailiya. I told her to stay there, but I don't know about anything there. I know Cairo, so we came to Giza. They told us that all of Sinai's Copts should register at the Social Solidarity Directorate in his governorate. I registered in Giza. Public relations called me two days later. They told me they were from the Giza governorate and the governor wanted to come visit me. I didn't believe it and hung up. Two days later they called again and I also didn't believe him. A week later, a private number called and told me it was office of the military governor in the Giza governorate and that Gen. Mohammed Kamal al-Dali wanted to meet me. I told him anywhere you would like and at any time. The governorate office called two days later and told me the governor wanted to meet me. Then I believed it and we met at the governor's office. Everyone related their problems and said what they wanted.

I'm someone who's a having it rough in Cairo, but I met with the people, like the Giza governor, who are good and I felt secure.

I won't be able to sell my property in Arish. When they say it's land owned by a Christian, it doesn't bring any money, because you want to leave and are scared of dying, so you'll sell it dirt cheap. Even Muslims in Arish want to leave. I told the governor I wanted my furniture from Arish and he told me that was difficult because there's no security in Arish. I told the governor I wanted to change my residency and ID documents and he agreed and changed everything. The very first day we reached Giza, the kids got into schools and they didn't demand documents. That's because of the Giza governor and the minister of education, who said the kids should just go to the nearest schools without any need for papers.

There are 25 displaced Christian families in Giza. The Giza governor got us a document to let us use the supply cards, but they stopped a while back. Now we're only allowed to use them for bread, the supply card itself was suspended. They also changed our car licenses and renewed them. That didn't happen in Ismailiya because there are more families there.

The state stood with the people of Rafah and gave people there 2 million EGP in compensation. I'm treated like a renter even though I owned my apartment in Arish.

I ask the state to compensate me for the property I left in Arish. I don't know if I'll be able to go back, or my kids will go back to get it, or whether they'll find that someone took it.

## **Mervat Fikry, Giza governorate**

We faced attempted assassinations in broad daylight, and in busy areas, not the outskirts. We would ask the prosecutors to come and take fingerprints, but they didn't come. We'd hear gunfire all the time, all the windows are pierced with bullet holes. My children go to the January 25 experimental school. Once I took them to school and as soon as I turned around, there was a blast at the school gate. The children saw corpses and gunfire and people slaughtered.

On January 9, 2017, it was the second day of Christmas. We woke up at 6 am to the sound of a horrific explosion. It was a fire brigade checkpoint, and people died in their homes. There was a checkpoint at the top of the street, but no checkpoint can rescue another one. The terrorists raised a flag on the site after the incident.

People are toiling under the loans they took out in Arish. Even Muslims there are forced to stay because they've got debts. I called my neighbour, a Muslim woman with six kids. She wants to leave, but doesn't know how of course. Of course, there are bonuses for the peripheral areas, so the salaries are a bit higher than the average, so they can afford to stay there.

Once I was visiting my uncle when my neighbour called me to ask if we'd left the door of the apartment open. I told him no and we came and found people trying to rob the apartment.

I decided we'd come to Giza and settle and won't ever go back to Arish, because we won't be terrified all the time of being killed.

## Mona, Cairo governorate

We're three families, all related, and lived in two houses in Arish: my mother and brothers in one house and me and my husband and kids in another. When people started being killed in their homes, we left everything and fled. I mean, we left all the furniture for the bride in the shop—she's also displaced, but she's staying with her sister in Port Said with other displaced people there. Everything is still brand-new, the china, the electrical appliances, and the furniture, it's all new. As for our things, they're all well used.

The bridegroom wants to have the wedding, but we can't get the furniture and we can't get new things again. My brother's a bridegroom and his furniture and apartment are still sitting there, all locked up. My house and furniture is all there. We left our home with just our clothes, we didn't even bring any winter clothing.

A few days before we fled Arish, I wasn't feeling well. I had just given birth via caesarean section on January 29 and I left Arish on February 24. I just left with my clothes. I didn't know where to go and wasn't able to collect anything. There wasn't money in the house to leave Arish. My neighbours helped out and gave me money so I could leave, because all my husband's money went to my treatment. I raised poultry at home—ducks and geese—and my Muslim neighbour took the birds and sold them at the market, getting me the money so I could hire a car and leave. She helped me with all that. We didn't know where we were going.

A priest told us to come to Cairo because we'd heard that the people in Ismailiya were sleeping in the street. There was no way for me to take three kids and a fourth one in my arms, and my brother's wife being pregnant, and go to Ismailiya to sleep in the street. My brother's wife was pregnant at the time and gave birth here. We couldn't sleep in the street.

People at the Samaan al-Kharraz Church met us and took us to the al-Samiri house. We were met by Madam Samia, Mr. Joseph, and Mr. Samih. They kept checking up on us. It was Madam Samia who looked for an apartment at a decent price. From February to July, we stayed at the church guesthouse. We asked the woman responsible for us to find a place we could all live in. She looked for us and found us this place. My brothers were worn out and tired from sitting around. They wanted to find work and have us in a house.



Social services didn't give us anything until October. They gave us 300 EGP and we pay 600 EGP in rent, so how is this sum going to take care of my kids and pay for rent and group lessons [after-school tuition]? Group lessons are very expensive here, more than they are there.

When I first went to the school, they laid it out for me: you're going to put your kids in group lessons and they'll have a good future. You don't do it and even if your kids are excellent, they'll still fail. So I put them in the lessons, I didn't know what to do any more. My husband works as a plumber, paid by the day. We applied to see if we were eligible for social assistance more than once, twice at social affairs and once with Madam Manar in the office in Tahrir, when I went there to get the 300 EGP. I told her we couldn't survive, we need food and drink and money for the kids, and I asked her to help me get a Sisi pension. She asked if we had applied and I said yes, twice. She did a rush appeal for me and sent it to the presidency, but there's been no solution and no one has followed up.

I've encountered many problems, but the biggest is that my daughter is in fifth grade and they wanted to send her back to fourth grade, because she was too young by four months and nine days. They told me to send her back to fourth grade. I went to the ministry and the department to get her into fifth grade, and thank God, the Lord stood with me.

I haven't changed my ID card to my address here. It won't work for me to change my address while my house and land and things are there. Maybe tomorrow the owner of the apartment will tell me to leave. Where would I go? I wouldn't have anything in Arish or anything in Cairo.

No one at all checked up on us. I came here as winter was coming and I had no clothes for my children. When I asked for them from the people, they said there aren't any. They told me to go and see about the aid collected in Ismailiya, that I should go and get assistance from there. So on the Feast of the Sacrifice I went to Arish. I took my younger brother and my four kids, telling myself I'd either come back with them or not. I got clothes, rugs, and furniture and finished furnishing my apartment.

I went to Arish and I couldn't find a car willing to bring me back. Again my Muslim neighbour called a driver and told him that her sister wanted to take a bit a furniture and stuff to Cairo. He came and loaded everything and the blankets and kids' winter clothes. The whole way back, the driver told me that if he had known I was Christian, the deal would have been different (meaning he would have asked for more money).

When I went to Arish, I wasn't showing much of my hair. I put a scarf on it and wore an ordinary abaya, and I took my kids like normal. When I passed through the search point, they asked me why I was going [to Arish]. I told them I'd come to get my kids' school documents and my furniture, but no security personnel came with me. I got out of the microbus because I was afraid of any trouble. I got out at al-Masa'id to stop a taxi. The taxi that should cost 10 EGP asked for 50 EGP to take me to my house. I was terrified—not for myself, but for my brother, because he has a tattoo of the two saints on his arms and he was wearing a t-shirt and his arms were showing. I had to put him in something with long sleeves.

Of course, I was terrified, but what put my mind at ease was that my cousin, the martyr Bassem Haraz, went there ahead of us. He couldn't find work and felt useless so he went back to Arish.

I met him there and spoke to him, telling him to leave. He told me, look, you can see I'm not well off and no one is standing by me. Look, he said, I'm living and fine and I've been here two months already. I told him that they could betray us at any moment. He told me not to worry because a

person who has God with him fears nothing.

Of course, I wish I could go back to my home and property and sleep soundly. I'd like to sleep without being afraid of whether I can pay the rent or not, to sleep without worrying about paying the electric bill. It's terrible here.

I mean, here all I think about when we're sitting around at night is how much money we have. How much can I pay to top off the electric meter? Did the boys work today or not? Work is hard here. Right now their backs are all scratched up, from all the plastic and things here. Those who can hire people here are vicious. When people find out they're strangers and need work, of course they work them twice as hard. This is hard. I feel bad for them, but we can't do anything about it. If they don't work, we won't eat, and we can't pay for anything.

No one comes to check up on us. At the beginning, when we were at al-Samiri, the Red Crescent people brought us to two boxes of things, but there's been nothing else. No one even asked who we were after that, or let us know we existed. No one knows anything about us.

They went into the apartment of my cousin, Shahat, in the al-Safa area, and took everything and all the furniture. We're following up with our Muslim neighbours there. We're close and they call us to reassure us.

One of our neighbours got a visit from thugs. A man went and asked for the key to the 'Christians' place,' saying we'd said they could go stay in the apartment to protect it. The neighbours told them they should get the key from the Christians' place, then, because they didn't have it. We'd given them the keys, but she had to deny it to protect her kids. I told her not to ever open the apartment in the daytime. Other neighbours called me to say that their rug had fallen into my balcony and they asked for the keys I left with my neighbour. I told them we took the keys with us. I had to lie to protect her as well.

I asked the driver how much it would cost if I wanted to get my stove, washer, refrigerator, and bedroom set from Arish. He said 3,000 EGP. Where will I get that kind of money?

My mother, she's elderly. What kind of future does she have? She has four men in the house. One's married and one's engaged. The money he had was used to buy two wedding rings. He had to go to Ismailiya to give the ring to his fiancée, she's there displaced like us. What is this? Since the day we came, Mom hasn't gotten her pension. They tell her to go get her papers from Sinai so they can sign them and give her the pension. We've gone everywhere and sent emergency appeals.

It was 450 EGP. It helped us, and now there's nothing. Everyone says our life is good and churches are helping us. On the holiday, we didn't have money to buy clothes. No church sent one scrap. Just the woman at the al-Samiri house, who went and got everyone an abaya and change of clothes.

None of the churches ask about us, and everyone passes us off to someone else. I get calls telling me that the Cathedral is helping us. I tell them to come see what we've gotten!

If you're rich, they love you, you're a friend of the church and the volunteers there, but if you're poor, you're useless. My mother went to the volunteer at the church and he asked her how many kids she had at home. She said four. He said, So you're bringing in 400 EGP a day, you should be giving to the church, not the opposite.

I went to the church to get milk for the children and they interviewed me. They asked me how

much furniture I had. I told them I'd brought the furniture from our house, that people had brought it to us, but I needed something to help the children.

My mother went to get my sister's documents so she could transfer her. The civil servant asked her why she was so upset. He said you are getting killed and so are the police.

But no one told us to leave, not security or anyone else. When we started being killed in our homes, we left.

## Annex (I)

### Press statement

September 24, 2017

With the new school year, Coptic students displaced from North Sinai confront state neglect.

EIPR: the state must swiftly place students in equivalent schools and universities and devise an appropriate plan for the return or compensation of the displaced

The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights condemns official bodies' treatment of the cases of Coptic university and school students whose families were forcibly displaced from Arish in February, after armed men targeted several Copts, killing them and setting fire to their homes and property. Government officials asked the parents of students in pre-university education to go to Arish to submit applications for transfers, obtain their children's school files, and submit them to the jurisdictions in which they now reside. In the case of students from the private Sinai University—about 80 students in all—the university administration asked them to resume their education in Arish and to live in the student dormitories while agreeing to cover costs that exceed their financial capabilities. This ignores the persistence of the same risks that endanger their lives, especially given the difficulty of the students transferring to equivalent private universities outside of North Sinai.

At the time of the crisis, the Ministry of Education issued directives to admit all Coptic students to schools closest to their current residences without any official documents. Arrangements were also made to admit post-secondary students to Suez Canal University and provide them with housing in the dormitories and any necessary support. Sinai University sent a professor weekly to the students at the university branch in al-Qantara to tutor the students.

The EIPR has received several complaints from displaced families about the government's neglect; and meagre assistance offered to them, which barely covers basic needs; and the uncertain educational future of their children. Several schools have asked parents to go to Arish to obtain their children's files from the school they previously attended and file new applications. Some universities have asked students to regularly attend classes in Arish and live there at their personal expense.

The EIPR said that interventions by executive officials and administrative leadership at the height of the crisis were apparently influenced by the media uproar surrounding the displacement, without any understanding of the magnitude of the problem or a plan to deal with its consequences. This approach has confirmed the fears raised by the report, "A Death Foretold: An Analytical Report on the Killing and Displacement of Arish Copts," about the fate of these families. The report speculated about whether their displacement would be short term or protracted and whether the government had an alternative plan to improve living conditions in Arish and address the reasons that prompted the city's Christians to leave, or whether it would do no more than provide small furnished rental apartments.

The EIPR renews its calls for an appropriate, time-bound plan to guarantee protection for the displaced who wish to return to Arish or assist those who wish to stay where they currently reside by providing the means for a dignified life, including jobs and compensation for their property com-

mensurate with its value for those who do not wish to return to Arish. We also ask the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education to form a committee to address the administrative obstacles barring students' admittance to equivalent colleges in the same academic year and the transfer of students' files, without requiring their families to return to Arish.

For more information, see the report:

*Select testimonies from students and their families*

A student at the Faculty of Pharmacy, currently living in the Tama district of the Sohag governorate, said:

We spent one term in different colleges—I was at Suez Canal University—but we learned that we have to return this year, although they told us when we left Arish that we wouldn't go back until security was restored. But there's no talk about a change in the security situation.

We had specific courses we were supposed to take in the summer, but we weren't able to because they're only taught in Arish. Now we don't know where we'll be when the school year starts. For me personally, I'm scared to go back to Arish, but at the same time, I don't know what I'll do about my future.

The mother of a student at the Information Technology College at Sinai University said:

The dean said he has to return to Arish, but of course we're frightened. I tried to transfer him to another private university, and they told me he had to start as a freshman, because that's the system in private universities. My son's currently in the third year. It's a shame to make him start over, and it's also very expensive. The fees for one year come to 25,000 EGP.

The dean told my son: "You guys cost the university a lot because the professors, during the crisis, volunteered to go teach here. Now they don't want to go back and forth." They're trying to find a solution now. Last year was an exception because of pressure from the minister of higher education, but the minister didn't do anything for the new year.

A student at the Faculty of Mass Communication currently living in Port Said said:

In July, the head of public relations at the Faculty of Mass Communication contacted me on behalf of the dean and told me that I needed to find housing inside the university, because the professors were not going to come and teach us at the university branch in Qantara like last year, even though they only came once and I was happy as long as I felt safe. So that means I have to go back to Arish and live in the dormitories, which is very expensive. That's in addition to the tuition costs, which alone are a lot. The housing will cost more than the college fee itself. University housing is about 11,000 EGP. Where will we get that money now?

We used to stay in the church housing, but we're afraid now of going to stay in Arish there. I've heard that some Christians girls are staying in student housing, but they wear the headscarf, and I would never do that. For two years, I've gotten excellent marks, and my dream was to join the faculty, but unfortunately, even if I considered transferring to another university, I'd have to start over. So I'm going back to Arish, but I'm scared.

A student at the Faculty of Pharmacy living in Ismailiya governorate said:

They promised us we wouldn't return to Arish except when the situation changed, and we haven't heard about any change or that Christians have gone back to Arish. Every option is difficult. University housing is very costly. There's no choice but to go back to Arish and stay at the church hostel, and that's dangerous. What are we supposed to do? They promised they'd facilitate the transfer of our papers. They said that a year ago and it didn't happen. The second term last year, the Qantara branch of the university made accommodations by providing professors to give us our classes, but this year they told us that the Faculty of Pharmacy is still new and there's no equivalent fourth year at the branch university, so we have to go back to Arish.

The mother of a student in primary school said:

This year, the education department won't put through the transfer papers from Arish to Ismailiya. They say we have to go ourselves and get the transfer papers. How? It's dangerous for us as Christians to go to Arish. I had to give power of attorney to people I know in Arish to do the papers for us, but so far none of the papers have come through. We also want to know if there's an exemption from fees for families who left Arish and are now living in Ismailiya. The fees are very high for us. We lost our source of income there, because we were self-employed.

## **Annex (2)**

### **Violations against Copts in North Sinai since 25th January revolution, 2011**

2011

- Church of Mar Girgis and the Holy Family in Rafah set on fire
- Attack on a hostel owned by the church in al-Masaid area, Arish

June 30, 2012–July 3, 2013 (period of Muslim Brotherhood rule)

- Hostile flyers distributed
- Copts in Rafah forcibly displaced; they later returned
- Six abductions for ransom

July 3, 2013–December 31, 2013

- Targeted killings: three victims, including Father Mina Aboud, in three separate incidents
- Anti-Coptic flyers distributed signed by Ansar al-Sharia in the Land of al-Kinana
- Mar Girgis Church in Arish set on fire
- Three abductions for ransom
- Copts in Rafah and Sheikh Zuwayd forcibly and permanently displaced

2014

- No targeted killings

2015

- Targeted killings: two victims in two separate incidents

2016

- Targeted killings: Two victims, including Father Rufael Moussa, in two separate incidents

2017

- Targeted killings: eight victims in seven separate incidents
- Homes torched and looted



- Anti-Coptic flyers and death threats distributed
- Mass exodus in the absence of state protection
- Uncertain future given the lack of a plan for dealing with the displaced