



# According

# to Which

# Customs

The Role of Customary Reconciliation

Sessions in Sectarian Incidents

and the Responsibility of the State

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## **The Role of Customary Reconciliation Sessions in Sectarian Incidents and the Responsibility of the State**

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## Introduction

The usage of customary reconciliation sessions, as a way of resolving sectarian attacks and conflicts, continues to be the subject of criticism from multiple entities, including official and quasi-official institutions, such as the National Council for Human Rights and some political parties. Voices from Coptic community in general and Egyptian churches in particular have spearheaded these criticisms. According to these voices, such sessions constitute a disturbing encroachment on the sovereignty of the state, its judicial system and on the principles of citizenship and non-discrimination. The starting point to resolve sectarian conflicts should be, instead, the immediate application of the provisions of the Constitution and the laws related to these conflicts, without discrimination or bias.

Since the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) is particularly interested in monitoring, documenting and analyzing patterns of violations for religious freedoms and the associated basic constitutional rights, this also includes the use of these societal mechanisms, their internal dynamics and their outputs. We examine whether these patterns enforce constitutional guarantee for religious freedoms and thereby remedy existing gaps in state security and judicial mechanisms, or if they violate human rights. This analysis is particularly important in light of the unprecedented rise in the frequency of resorting to customary sessions as an alternative mechanism to contain sectarian conflicts and reduce civil strife after the revolution of January 25, 2011, according to EIPR's research. Since its establishment, this mechanism has served to further deepen sectarian strife rather than to contain it. The decisions and rulings coming out of these sessions contain several violations of rights guaranteed by the Constitution. The way in which these customary sessions operate lack the simplest guarantees for effectiveness and legitimacy, the first of which is to ensure equal and effective representation of all sides of the conflict and to refrain from coercing any one side to accept the outcomes. In the absence of these guarantees, customary sessions have simply replicated many shortcomings of the existing judiciary. As for the outputs of these sessions, they have frequently contradicted customary norms, in addition to contravening the principle of equal rights enshrined in the Constitution. These trends which we have examined have led us

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to conclude that it is imperative to utilize legal frameworks and work with local governmental and religious institutions, political parties and civil society, to ensure that customary sessions support social integration rather than deepen sectarian divisions.

This report documents incidents starting January 2011 to date, a period that witnessed profound constitutional, political and cultural transformations, holding the possibility of eliminating socially prevalent and constitutionally backed forms of discrimination and instead establishing guarantees for exercising one's freedom of religion and belief and its associated set of rights. This period also marked a significant decline in the work of law enforcement and security forces to carry out their duties and responsibilities as dictated by the law. It is further pertinent to focus on these four years in particular as they indicate the extent to which different forms of discrimination have taken root socially, whether or not they could be overcome in the future and the obstacles that stand in the way of overcoming them, including, of course, the tension between the role of customs and the laws of the state.

The report begins with a quick overview of the relationship between state agencies and the Coptic community under former President Hosni Mubarak, and outlines the most important problems that continued after his overthrow. It then describes the prominent patterns in sectarian conflicts classifies them into six main types: conflicts over the practice of religious rituals, conflicts over consensual sexual and emotional relationships, conflicts relating to the expression of opinion on religious issues, conflicts resulting from community disputes, conflicts arising from political differences and finally, conflicts resulting from the exploitation of Copts as a minority group, such as kidnappings or financial blackmail. The report then turns to present a quantitative and qualitative analysis of customary sessions in terms of their geographical prevalence, and the link between this prevalence and different political entitlements and the frequency of resorting to customary sessions in each of the previously cited six classifications. It examines the composition of these councils, the mechanisms by which they operate, the nature of their outputs and the manner in which they differ from those of other customary sessions that look into civil or criminal disputes. Finally, the report provides a rights-based reading of the outputs of these sessions in light of the provisions of the Egyptian Constitution and law, as well as the international rights treaties ratified by successive Egyptian governments.

The author of this report relied on data collected through the monitoring and documentation activities undertaken by EIPR over the last four years, including quarterly reports on freedom of religion and belief. This data is provided as an annex to the report.

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## Changing Regimes, Same Sectarian Strife

Egypt witnessed numerous incidents of sectarian tension and violence during the final years of the rule of former President Hosni Mubarak, and before the revolution of January 25, 2011. Human rights reports have documented the geographic expansion and escalation of this violence, the monopoly exercised by security forces over dealing with sectarian cases and the absence of political will to end this pattern of violence and the various facets of discrimination against Coptic citizens on the basis of religion. The last year of Mubarak's rule represented a milestone and the beginning of a new phase, characterized by unusual patterns of sectarian violence. In the first hours of 2010, gunshots were fired at a gathering of Copts in front of the Nag' Hammadi church, north of Quena, after Christmas Mass, killing seven people. In November of the same year, security forces attacked a gathering of Copts in the Omraneya district in Giza, killing two Copts and wounding dozens in clashes that erupted over a controversy about converting a religious services building in the area to a church. Furthermore, the disappearance of the citizen Camellia Shehata, and the mystery surrounding the circumstances of her disappearance and her return constituted an incident of heightened sectarian tension. The incident was accompanied by calls from several groups associated with the Salafi movement to organize a chain of protests demanding Camellia's return, among other women the Salafis called "the kidnapped Muslim women." These were the groups that surrounded the churches and St. Marks Cathedral in Abbaseya the following year, effectively rendering them under siege. Within the first minutes of 2011, Al-Qiddissine Church in Alexandria was bombed, claiming the lives of more than twenty-five victims and the injury of dozens more.

The state's political apparatus was absent, and it did not have the political will to deal in a serious manner with violations against Copts. In fact, the state often provided protection for the instigators and perpetrators of this violence through its failure to conduct adequate searches and criminal investigations. In spite of the fact that some of the perpetrators were already known and identified by the security forces, the state agencies failed to bring the suspects to trial. In such a climate, anger was mounting among groups of Christians, who took to the streets in demonstrations, raising religious slogans and anti-state institutions rhetoric after each sectarian attack.

Through the analysis of several incidents of sectarian violence that took place under Mubarak, we have reached the following conclusions:

First, the security apparatus and political elites nurtured the idea of «The Islamic Alternative,» meaning they advocated a perception that any degree of political openness would potentially lead to a religious state, ruled by Iranian style clerics, or at least into an authoritarian state governed by Islamic currents and groups. The application of “The Islamic Alternative” consequently reflected negatively on human rights, especially when taking into account the discriminatory tone of the leaders of these groups. This explains the reaction of the official Orthodox Church, which warned Coptic citizens from participating in the demonstrations on January 25, 2011, then fell silent with the turn of events in the following days. Later, with the expansion of popular protests, youth Bishop, Anba Moussa spoke out and adopted the demands of the demonstrators. This does not mean that the Copts did not take part in the demonstrations of January 25 as Egyptian citizens, as many of them, especially civil and political activists, were present since the beginning. Moreover, the Evangelical Church was faster than the Orthodox Church in responding officially to demonstrators’ demands, especially since the Doubbara Palace Church is only a few meters away from Tahrir Square. The Church opened its doors for demonstrators to use its main yard as a field hospital to tend to the injured.

Second, the same political and security elites, as well as the presidency, dealt with Copts as subjects represented by the Church, not as citizens entitled to all their rights and accountable for their own actions. This was due to reasons related to the use of Copts as a single bloc providing support and legitimacy to the regime, hence it was thought that it was only necessary to address the Church. This approach contributed to the withdrawal of the majority of Copts from the political sphere and the Church reconciling with the prevalent forms of religious discrimination. In the Church, Copts found an alternative to state institutions that could provide them with health and education services and even entertainment.

Third, the state was inclined towards denying the existence of sectarian tensions between Muslims and Copts, or underestimating their occurrence and impact. Admitting to such problems would have required solutions, and no solutions could be sought without Copts getting their entitlements as citizens, which would in turn necessitate legislative and executive procedures to deliver these entitlements. As mentioned earlier, such political will did not exist. The state continued to handle the rights of Copts as a security issue that was almost exclusively the responsibility of the state security agency before its dissolution.



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## Sectarian Violence Post Jan25: Absence of Protection and Failure of Official Containment Attempts

During the first days of the January 25, 2011 demonstrations, religious affiliations faded into the background for a while, at least amidst the lines of protestors in Tahrir Square and other mass protest sites. General demands for democracy took center stage. However, after the departure of former President Hosni Mubarak, various forms of sectarian practices quickly surfaced. Sectarian violence escalated significantly, both during the transitional phase under the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and during the rule of President Mohamed Morsi, as well as during the current phase. This included armed attacks with live bullets, arson and the demolishing of churches and the theft of homes and properties. The violence reached its peak during August 14-17, 2013, when around a hundred churches and Coptic religious facilities were attacked. Most of these buildings sustained severe damages as they were broken into, looted and set on fire in the absence of security forces. At least ten citizens were killed after being targeted for their religious identity. The escalation of sectarian tension in this unprecedented manner is due to several factors:

Firstly: In addition to failing to intervene in a timely manner after the outbreak of sectarian violence, security forces also failed to bring perpetrators to justice or even to arrest any suspects, culminated by physical absence of police forces since January 25, which is the phenomenon known in the media as “the security vacuum.”

Secondly: Almost all observers agree that there was a general feeling among the Coptic community after the ouster of Mubarak that the time had come to modify their relationship with the state, by demanding full citizenship rights. Freedom of practice of religious rituals was the first area to witness rapid attempts for a redefinition vis-a-vis the state. Many believed that policies denying the building of churches, restricting the processes of their restoration or expanding them, should no longer be enforced. As a result, many Copts exercised their legitimate right to make adjustments, add extensions or renovate churches without permits from official bodies. Many in the Muslim community in these areas objected and gathered to declare their rejection of the new reality.

Thirdly: Criminals managed to exploit the existing security vacuum and the accompanying lack of trust among the people in the police apparatus to enforce the law in an arbitrary manner. They were able to intimidate citizens and to take over a large number of Coptic properties and land, as well as impose unfair financial demands on them in return for lack of intimidation. Criminals also kidnapped Copts and forced their families to pay huge sums of money as ransom. The demonstration of force against the Coptic community stemmed from their perception as a weak minority in Egyptian society.

Fourthly: The discourse of the Islamic groups that were newly engaged in the political process was not reassuring for Copts, especially since the former had started raising explicitly sectarian slogans as early as the March 2011 referendum. This discourse was evident in discussions over the successive elections and in the increase in the number of demonstrations of an explicit sectarian nature, such as the one against the appointment of a Coptic governor in the province of Quena, amongst the first governor appointments after the ouster of Mubarak. The escalation in sectarian violence, during the period of SCAF and under the former president Mohamed Morsi, was a clear indication of the role played by a considerable section of Islamic groups in manipulating and triggering sectarian crises. They marginalized the rule of law in favor of customary interventions that allowed them greater presence and the ability to enforce arrangements that do not guarantee reparation and instead allow the aggressors to evade punishment.

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# All Roads Lead to Sectarianism

Incidents of sectarian violence in Egypt in recent years reveal different patterns of sectarian practices that continue to lead to the violation of the fundamental rights of Coptic citizens. These practices can be summarized in six main trends:

## Prohibition of Prayer

Preventing Copts from practicing their religious rites is one of the most common violations of a constitutently enshrined right. It is also one of the violations where a wide range of citizens and the state apparatus are involved. The violation finds support in laws and policies that place restrictions on the building of churches and religious or services buildings. The Hamayouni Decree of 1856, and what is known as the 1934 Ezabi Pasha stipulations, govern the process of constructing churches in a way that makes it all but impossible, especially in informal areas or in villages in rural Egypt. The process requires the issuing of permits that could take several years to obtain. Even in cases where Copts succeeded in obtaining the permits, the process of building was often halted by societal rejection in the region and its associated sectarian incitement, which pushed security forces to intervene.

The intimidation continues in spite of the ruling of the Administrative Court in Case No. 7635 for the legal year 60 issued on February 26, 2013, concerning the demolition and rebuilding of churches, which stipulated that the restoration and rebuilding of churches requires no special approval, and that agreement from the authorities responsible for construction in the various governorates is enough and does not require further approval from the governor. Nevertheless, security forces continued with their intimidating practices and citizens continued to bully Copts.

The reality of the situation is that security and executive bodies are still dealing with the decision to build and renovate churches as purely a security issue. Even if a church receives approval from the highest authorities in

the state hierarchy, the implementation could be halted on the pretext of security concerns. In some cases, security retained the homes of citizens during construction, citing rumors that the building would be turned into a church. Instead of supporting the owner and their right to construct whatever building they wish – as long as they committed no violation of laws – security placed the building under reservation, halted its construction and very often, arrested the owner.

## Interfaith Emotional or Sexual Relationships

This issue causes a lot of sectarian violence, especially in light of the entrenched pattern to view all Christians as a «tribe,» where all members become liable for any error committed by one of them, even if the Copts in question were not at all related or acquainted. In parallel, all Muslims become collectively responsible for the honor of the Muslim girl or woman in question, and assign themselves the duty of its defense. In this pattern of violence, the incidents usually begin with a consensual relationship between two parties, one Muslim and the other Christian. Soon, however, the tense atmosphere is exploited, and these types of relationships are framed as battle between the two faiths.. As a result, more and more people come out to support their respective faith. Such societal practices lead to the escalation of simple incidents that wouldn't normally break out in such a manner if the parties concerned were of the same faith. In one incident, for example, a Christian man paid the microbus fare for a Muslim woman. Those who intervened took this act to mean that there is a relationship between the man and the woman. They set the Christian man's house on fire, as well as his place of work. Similarly, when a Christian man and a Muslim woman were walking together in a public street in the middle of the city of Amereya, Muslims in the community found cause to assault the Christian man. In the same fashion, when a Christian family assaulted a Muslim for verbally harassing their daughter, Muslims in the community headed to attack the church, as if it were responsible for the Christian man's act of harassment.

## Expressing Opinion on Religious Matters

There are two types of practices that lead to sectarian violence that we will mention here. The first is associated with what is known as «defamation of religions,» which has spread in recent years in an unprecedented manner. EIPR recorded 48 cases of civil and judicial persecution between January 2011 and the end of 2013. In some of these cases, a customary council decided the punishment enforced, while in others, the source of his employment enforced the punishment. This is in addition to another 28 cases reviewed by the courts during this period. EIPR recorded the increase in the number of these cases from only three in 2011, to 12 in 2012

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and then to 13 cases during 2013. The courts convicted 28 out of a total of 42 defendants, acquitted three defendants and did not accept the cases for 11 defendants, because the cases were not filed by a competent party.

Such incidents would often start as a normal discussion that has nothing to do with sacred religious texts. The conversation would then be misconstrued and the Christians concerned would be reported to the police for defamation of Islam. In one incident, a pharmacist compared two statements, one for Sheikh Al-Howeiny and another to Dr. Mohamed al-Baradei about educational development. This was met by incitement against him and an attack on his pharmacy that forced him to permanently leave the village as well as forced his father to sell the pharmacy. In such incidents, the complaint against the subject accused of defaming Islam and the resulting legal prosecution was not enough. In many cases, the subject is punished socially, administratively and judicially: socially through the customary sessions that force penalties, including forced displacement, selling of properties and paying financial penalties; administratively through applying legal sanctions by his source of employment, and finally judicially by instigating criminal proceedings against him.

The second type of violence relates to cases of religious conversion. People wishing to convert from Christianity to Islam face no problems related to changing their declaration of religion in official documents (in a few cases they were assaulted by their parents), while those wanting to convert from Islam to Christianity face charges of apostasy. This situation has led to the disappearance of some converts and it was later announced that they fled in order to convert to Christianity. In these cases, some people accuse the Church of spearheading this conversion under the false notion that all Christians act on behalf of Church and are represented by it, as noted previously. The angry parents of the convert, along with the community that decided to express solidarity with them, would then attack the nearest church, while demanding that the church return the person who had converted to Christianity. In a few cases, the opposite has taken place. For example, a number of angry Copts would hold a sit-in in one of the churches to protest the disappearance of a Coptic woman rumored to have converted to Islam.

## Community Disputes

These usually begin as a normal fight or a dispute over land ownership. However, for many reasons they turn into a sectarian conflict where supporters join either party. The fights often result in collective punishment, assaults and other illegal practices.

## Political Violence

The fifth pattern of sectarian clashes is related to the political situation where political players are directly involved in escalating or fueling tensions and turning them into a full-blown sectarian conflict. As mentioned earlier, this pattern increased after the revolution of January 25 with the rise of Islamic groups and parties. Some of them were involved in discriminatory practices. We shed light on this pattern in the last section of this report.

## Exploiting the Vulnerability of Copts

The sixth and final pattern is one that is associated with many incidents that occurred after the revolution of January 25, 2011. It has to do with exploiting the vulnerable status of Copts and the failure of security forces to perform their role in protecting citizens and their property. In the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, the phenomenon of kidnapping Copts and demanding ransom for their return became widespread. Although it has not been explicitly proven that the act is motivated by the religious identity of the victims, or that it is undertaken by actors who are systematically affiliated with any recognized Islamic groups or currents, the constant in these cases is the general exploitation of the vulnerability of Copts and the failure of the security forces to carry out their proper duty by protecting them.

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# Customary Rulings in Sectarian Tensions: State Policy or Societal Alternatives?

A large number of cases involving sectarian conflicts, especially in Upper Egypt, end up in customary reconciliation sessions. This has faced widespread criticism from many within the Coptic community who see these sessions as a form of legal manipulation that allows suspects to evade punishment and consolidate religious discrimination.

Customary arbitration is one form of dispute resolution historically rooted in the stages that predate the modern state and its judicial and legal systems. Customary sessions rely on the accumulation of a set of customary rules that, over time, have formed a prevailing norm within particular frameworks or groupings. Their mission is to address conflicts arising between individuals, families, households or workers/employees of certain professions. With the passage of time, these different norms and their applications have acquired a binding force.

Parties to the conflict decide on a neutral place for arbitration, as well as neutral and unbiased arbitrators. Each side then presents their account of the incident, its reasons, how it developed and the resulting damage without interruption. The two sides present evidence and proof in support of their claims. The arbitrators are then left alone to assess and estimate the errors of each position. They later announce their verdict and file a reconciliation report that include the parties to the conflict, the date of the session, its place, the nature of the dispute, the terms of the agreement, the council's decision and the signatures of the parties. They also place a penalty clause stipulating the amount of money to be paid by either party in the case of breaching the terms of the reconciliation agreement.

There is no consistent format for customary reconciliation councils for sectarian conflicts, whether on the local level (the village or district) or at the level of the governorate. Customary councils are usually established immediately after the incidents take place. The power and influence of their members vary according to the nature of the problem, the extent of its escalation and the influence and the power of the families party to the

conflict and their relationship with the state. Usually parties seek customary reconciliation councils where the arbitrators are known to be experienced and influential. Often, the formation of a council is a clear reflection of the size and influence of the Muslim majority in the area or of a specific religious current among them.

The sectarian incidents in Upper Egypt, where the largest number of such clashes occur, are divided into two groups. The first encompasses the north of Giza all the way to the south of Minya. This sector does not witness officially drawn customary sessions but it has well known arbitrators who intervene with attempts to reconcile parties of a conflict whenever sectarian incidents arise. This takes place under the auspices of executive and legislative officials, which is a role that was usually performed by former members of the People's Assembly belonging to the National Democratic Party, and was later performed by members of new political parties after the January 25 revolution, especially the Building and Development party (affiliated with Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya) and Al-Nour Party (affiliated with the Salafi currents). Usually, these councils are comprised of heads of influential families with ex familiar with the area, especially those from Arab tribes and public figures in most villages. The composition changes from one case to another and the arbitrators are selected by the parties to the conflict according to their desires and their trust in the individuals, believing that they will be able to illustrate their point of view during the session and thereby tip the scale in their favor.

The second sector starts at the governorate of Assuit and encompasses the area all the way to Aswan. In this area, there are fixed councils of a composition that is known to the authorities. For example, the governor of Assiut and the security director have issued decisions to have customary reconciliation councils comprised of men from the local administration. Ten such councils were formed, one in each of the governorate's districts. Each council consists of ten to fifteen members, including public figures known for their good reputation and influence in their localities. These figures are selected on the basis of having solid experience in reconciliation or are specialists whose experience can be counted upon to arbitrate conflicts. According to local sources, reconciliation councils in carevenge killings (Ttha'r), for example, have a constant form. Their scope of work starts in the north in Sohag and extends southwards to Aswan. They include local leaders, such as the mayors, heads of tribes and families and religious leaders and they work in coordination with the executive and security apparatuses in the city.

There is no written law that governs the work of customary sessions which would limit the amount of discretion given to the arbitrators. However, there are inherited norms agreed upon by arbitrators. These norms are used as rules to specify the amount of compensation that is proportional to the harm caused. Such laws are inconsistently re-examined in accordance with the changes in the rate of inflation in society. For example,



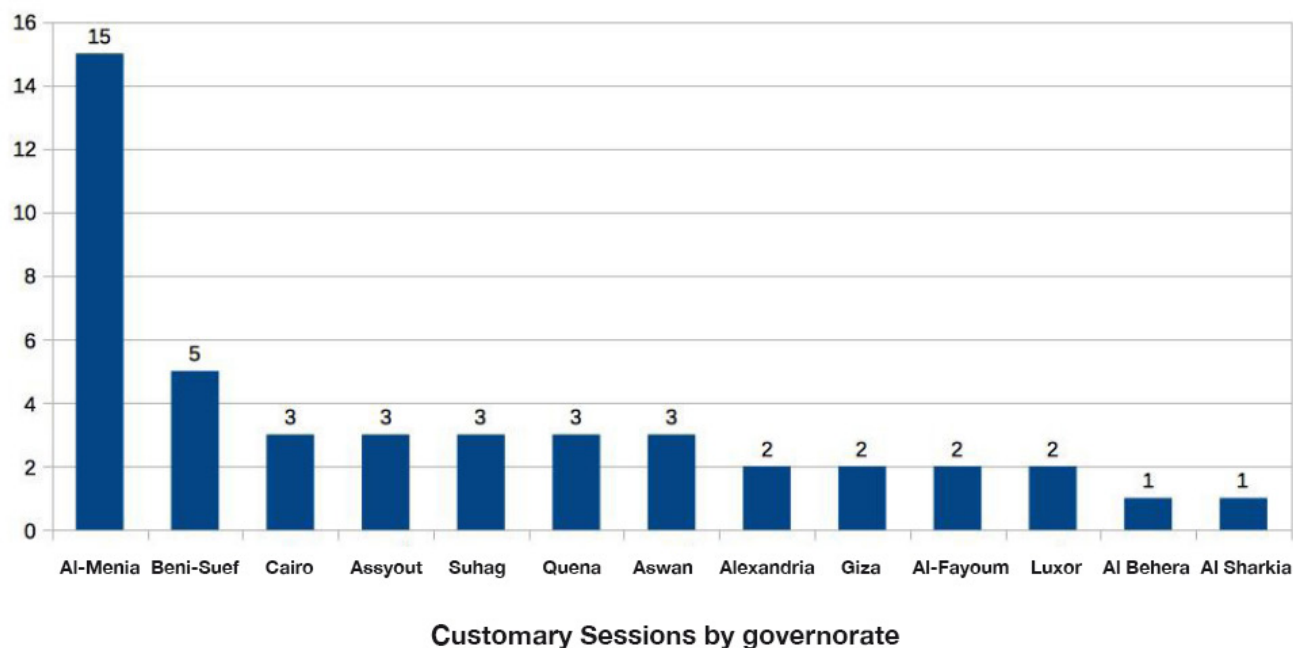
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the blood money (diya) was LE316,000 in Minya last year, but it was increased to LE400,000 after a meeting among arbitrators this year. On the other hand, a surgical stitch is estimated at LE1000 and a broken bone at LE25,000. Additionally, the diya for a woman is half that of a man's. On the other hand, the payment for the burning or robbery of a house is estimated after a survey of the scene of the crime. In council cases, the rulings of the customary councils are not physical and do not conflict with personal liberties.

## Customary Sessions over Four Years

EIPR recorded around forty-five incidents of sectarian assault since the beginning of the revolution of January 25, 2011 that were dealt with through customary reconciliation sessions. This figure does not represent all the incidents of sectarian tension and assaults that Egypt witnessed during this period. In fact, the researcher traced more than one hundred and fifty sectarian incidents during the period from January 25, 2011, until mid-2013, resulting in the death of one hundred and sixteen people, in addition to the injury of hundreds more. These included, for example, the clashes in Manshiyet Nasser and the sectarian attacks in Imbaba (2011) and the attacks on Saint Mark's Cathedral in Abbasseya, which left in its wake a large number of casualties (2013). This list excludes, however, the acts of looting and arson of churches, religious buildings and properties of Copts in the aftermath of the dispersal of the Rab'a and Nahda sit-ins, which affected more than a hundred Christian religious establishments. Therefore, the report does not address some of the popular forms of protection for churches that civilians resorted to in this period. Moreover, this figure does not represent all the incidents that were resolved using customary sessions. It only documents the cases that the researcher was able to track and for which related information could be documented, such as the reasons that led to the incident, its aftermath and its resolution. The researcher also gathered feedback from the parties of the conflicts and arbitrators about the customary sessions that took place.

## From Cairo to Aswan



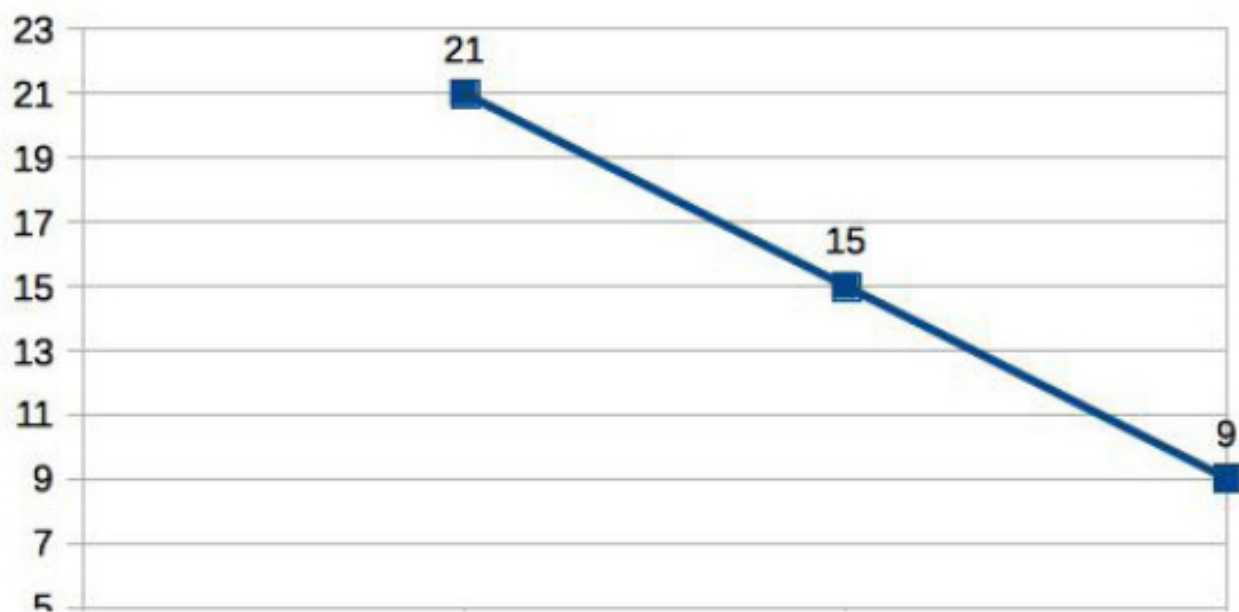
Thirteen governorates witnessed customary reconciliation sessions following sectarian tensions. Almost 48% of these cases came from Upper Egypt. All governorates south of Cairo, with the exception of the provinces of the New Valley and the Red Sea governorates, were on the list of governorates where these sessions were held to resolve sectarian tensions and conflicts. This could be explained by the notable Christian presence in these governorates in comparison to the Delta governorates or the governorates by the borders which would in turn lead to greater interaction between the two faiths in these governorates which sometimes leads to assaults that are sectarian in nature. Moreover, these governorates are predominantly rural in character and they enjoy a presence of Arab tribes, creating a parallel authority to that of the state and encouraging customary councils as a means for resolving such conflicts. -

The governorate of Minya witnessed fifteen cases, amounting to 33.3% of the total, which is an indicator of the extent of sectarian tension prevailing in the area. This could be one of the reasons that officials and local leadership resorted to customary sessions, in order to calm tensions in society and prevent them from spreading beyond the concerned parties.

Beni-Suef was next on the list, with five cases, followed by Cairo, Assuit, Sohag, Qena and Luxor, with three cases each. Giza, Alexandria, Fayoum and Luxor followed them on the list, with two cases each. Finally, Beheira and Sharkiya witnessed one case each.

The incidents in the northern Upper Egyptian governorates (Beni-Suef, Fayoum, Minya, Assuit and Sohag,) amount to 62.2% when grouped together. It is worth noting that these governorates are at the bottom of the Human Development Index and suffer from poor basic services.

## ... From SCAF to Abdel Fattah al-Sisi



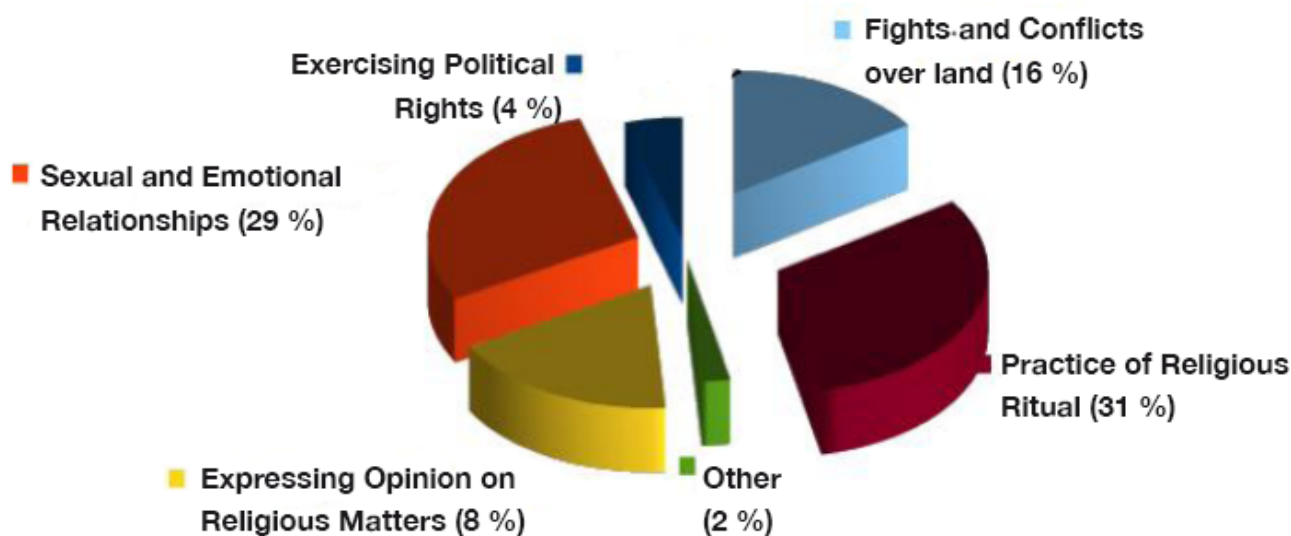
**The development of customary sessions according to change of presidency**

As shown by the graph above that displays the division of cases of customary sessions by year, 2011 witnessed sixteen cases. This decreased in 2012 to only nine cases and then increased again to fourteen in 2013. It is worth noting again that the graph excludes the assaults that took place in the aftermath of the dispersal of the Rab'a and Nahda sit-ins. While churches and Coptic buildings and properties were being attacked, some Muslims in many regions secured them by organizing something akin to popular protection. Only six cases were recorded in 2014.

When divided by presidential term, we find that many of the incidents occurred under the governance of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), when twenty-one cases were recorded between January 2011 and June 2012, averaging around a case every month. Under Mohamed Morsi, there were fifteen cases in twelve months, averaging around 1.25 cases every month. In both periods therefore – under SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood – customary reconciliation sessions were adopted as a mechanism to enforce the law and calm religious tensions.

The interim period under former President Adly Mansour and the current period under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, however, witnessed nine cases. Sectarian violence decreased days after the dispersal of the Rab'a and Nahda sit-ins for many reasons, the most important of which is the increase in the influence of the security apparatus and the retreat of those affiliated with Islamic groups at the local level.

## Different Reasons, Same Path



**Distribution of Customary Sessions according to reasons of sectarian tensions**

**The first group** refers to incidents of sectarian violence that took place against a backdrop of religious rituals, such as preventing the opening of a new church, preventing worship in an established church, preventing the restoration of an existing church or service building, or objecting to the installation of a church bell. Some of the attacks took place under the pretext of preventing people coming from villages without churches from praying. Often Copts had the construction of their houses halted after reports were submitted stating that their owners intended to turn them into churches for prayer. Fourteen cases occurred on this pretext, amounting to 31% of the total number of cases. All of them were cases where the Christian party was attacked, except in one case, when clashes erupted between two villages in Minya over a rumor that the village of Bayadeya (with a Christian majority) prevented the Muslims of the village from praying in the village's mosque. This led some residents from the village of Rayermoon to obstruct the road between the two villages and to assault a number of Copts from the former village, including the priest of the church of the village of Bayadeya.

The incidents usually started when a number of Copts in a neighborhood began to restore or expand a church, or when a group of Copts prayed inside a house, instigating the objection of Muslims who would often surround the building and prevent the Christians from entering. Attacks against churches often resulted in the burning and destruction of the building, as well as random attacks against the properties of Christians in the area in general. Additionally, many attacks accompanied rejections for restoring or building churches. This frequently took place in the presence of security forces, either those who performed routine security patrols or those who showed up after the outbreak of attacks.

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**The second group** includes incidents of sectarian violence resulting from relationships between men and women of different religions. These constitute 29% of the disputes, even though the majority of these relationships are consensual. A small number of these clashes resulted from harassment or accusations of sexual assault. However, in all cases the problem takes on a sectarian dimension when supporters join either party based on religious affiliation, or when they proceed to attack a nearby church. In three incidents, tensions began due to the existence of a consensual sexual relationship between Christian men and Muslim women. Two other incidents took place because a Muslim woman converted to Christianity. In three incidents, a Copt was accused of sexually harassing a Muslim girl. It is also noteworthy that sectarian violence sometimes erupted over normal everyday practices, such as when a Christian man paid the bus fare for his Muslim neighbor, or when a Christian man walked with his Muslim female neighbor in broad daylight.

The pattern that dominates in these attacks is that an individual incites the crowds and mobilizes a number of residents of a village or district to start attacking Copts in a random manner. Some mosques or prayer areas have been used to call for avenging (th'ar) the honor of Muslims from al-Nasara (a term occasionally used by locals to refer to Christians). The crowds then head first to the home of the Christian implicated in the incident, which often escalates into the looting and arson of his/her property. The aggressors then head to other Copts' homes, those who share with the aggressor nothing more than his religious identity. In a number of cases, churches were attacked and those inside were assaulted by aggressors chanting hostile religious slogans. There were also incidents when security forces succeeded in preventing crowds from attacking a church by cordoning off the surrounding area, such as in the cases of the demonstrations against the church of St. George in Kom Ombo and Wasti. Other times, however, the crowds managed to attack and storm churches.

**The reactions of residents in these incidents were as follows:**

- The events were dealt with through a legal framework in only one incident. This involved the case of a Muslim family that accused the Christian owner of a building in Zawya al-Hamra neighborhood in Cairo of sexually harassing one of the family's children during a clinic visit. As soon as the incident took place, one of the priests in the region quickly visited a nearby mosque and arranged for a customary session in order to put an end to calls that had started to spread inciting attacks on Copts in the neighborhood.
- In three incidents, angry mobs assaulted only the person implicated in the problem and attacked his/her property (house, apartment or store) either by looting or looting and arson.
- In seven incidents, Copts were assaulted and collectively punished because of their religious identity. This accounts for more than 50% of the cases.

- In six incidents, nearby churches were surrounded and attacked. These attacks ranged from the throwing of rocks, breaking of fences or exterior church crosses, all the way to breaking in and tampering with the contents of churches, or burning them down or demolishing them. Four churches suffered from wide range attacks due to sectarian tensions: the church of Saint George and Saint Mina in Sol village (Atfeeh district) in the south of Cairo, Abu Fam al-Guindy church in the village of Marashda in Qena, which was broken into and its gates and crosses were broken, the Church of Al-Amir Tadros (Prince Tadros) in Men-bal village (Matay district), north of Minya, which was broken into, its contents tampered with and its windows broken, and the church services building in the village of Basra, as well as the Amereya Center in Alexandria.
- In one incident, the aggressors, who are affiliated with the Salafi movement, cut the ear of a Christian man, explaining that he had been renting an apartment to a Muslim woman they accused of having a bad reputation. They burnt down the apartment and attacked both the Christian man and the woman. They then called the security apparatus and notified them that they had carried out «God's law» (shar' Allah) and were waiting for the police to arrive and enforce it.

**The third group** relates to freedom of expression concerning religious issues. These amount to eight incidents. They do not include all cases of defamation of religion, only those cases that were followed by sectarian violence and collective punishment. All of these incidents were against Christians, and five of them started when someone “liked” a Facebook post that some considered to be in contempt of Islam. In one incident, the accusation against a Christian man was that he was in contempt of Salafi sheikhs by comparing two statements about education on his Facebook page. One of these statements was for Al-Howeiny and the other was for Dr. Mohamed al-Baradei. Another incident was related to a case that developed after religious discussions between female students at Assuit’s university dorms. One more incident was a result of accusing two uneducated children of defacing a copy of the Quran. All of these incidents took place in Upper Egyptian governorates: three in Minya, two in Assuit, and one incident in each of Beni-Suef, Luxor and Aswan.

These cases usually started when crowds of Muslims from a village and its surrounding areas gathered in front of the implicated person’s house. The protest then quickly escalated into attacks on this individual or his/her family’s property, or the collective punishment of the Copts of the village or district. In four incidents, the situation escalated into attacks on personal property in the Radisseya village in Aswan, the village of Al-Mahameed Bahary in Luxor and the villages of Abu Garg and Abu Sidhom in Minya. In two incidents, the attacks were against the properties of a Coptic family. The first was in the village of Ezbet Shakir in Beni-Mazar, when an

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angry crowd attacked the homes of a Coptic family because one of them “liked” a Facebook photo considered to be in contempt of the Islamic religion. In the second incident, the attacks spilled over into neighboring villages when a high school student “liked” a photo considered to be in contempt of Islam’s Prophet Mohamed. This started a wave of attacks against Copts in four villages: Adr, Baheeg, Manqabad and Salam.

In one incident, no attacks occurred, as a report was filed at the Al-Fashn police station accusing two uneducated children of defacing a copy of the Quran. As soon as the news spread, a customary session was held in the evening of the same day, during which a number of representatives of the Christians of the village apologized for the incident. It was also agreed to continue with the legal procedures and not to respond to the calls for incitement against Copts, which lasted several days.

Intervention in clashes between Muslim and Christian female students in the dorms of Assuit University occurred in the same manner. The leadership of Al-Jama’a al-Islamiya contacted the university’s president, who decided to end the residency of a Christian female student and to refer four female students, along with a building supervisor, to administrative investigation without taking any legal action against the students.

**The fourth group** includes fights and conflicts over land and other property. These usually began as any normal dispute between two parties of one religion, but sometimes quickly escalated into sectarian attacks. They account for 16% of the incidents of sectarian violence, and unfolded in this manner:

- In Nazlet Farag in Minya, a group of Muslims from the village and surrounding villages attacked the Copts of Nazlet Farag after a quarrel between a Muslim and a Christian. The attacks led to the death of a Christian man, the burning of six houses owned by Christians, the setting on fire of a car owned by a Christian priest and the breaking of the village mosque’s windows.
- In Mattareya neighborhood in Cairo, a fight between a Muslim and a Christian escalated into an exchange of gunshots, which led to the death of the Muslim.
- In the village of Dahshour in Giza, a dispute between a Muslim and a Copt (who irons clothes for a living) escalated into clashes between the families of both and led to the death of the Muslim. This developed into acts of theft and arson against most of the Coptic houses in the village. Most of the Copts had already fled the village in fear for their lives when the incident first started.
- In the village of Tayeba in Minya, a fight took place between two neighbors, one Muslim and the other Christian. The fight escalated into random gunshots fired at the houses of the Copts in the village (which has a majority Christian population).

- In Ezbet Dabous in Dayrout, north of Assuit, dozens of Muslims from the village stormed land belonging to the monastery of the martyr Tadros al-Mashreq. They argued that the land was state property even though it belonged to the monastery, according to official registered documents. The trespassers put up a sign that read “Mother of Believers’ School” (Om al-Mo’meneen).
- In the Alexandrian Macarius monastery (Yusuf al-Siddiq district) in Fayoum, a dispute erupted between the monastery’s priests and the Ministry of Environment and some of the neighborhood’s Muslim residents. The dispute was about the ownership of a piece of land that the priests had taken over and built a fence around.
- In Bibba in Beni Suef, a crowd of Muslims stormed and took over a house owned by the archbishops of Bibba.

**The fifth group** includes incidents related to the exercise of political rights and religious polarization against the backdrop of political disputes. The most prominent of these incidents took place during the parliamentary elections in January 2012, when the Christians of Rahmaneya village in Qena were prevented from voting. It was argued that they supported candidates of the dissolved National Democratic Party, who were running against a candidate affiliated with one of the Islamic parties. In another incident, sectarian attacks took place on a large scale in the village of Beni-Ahmed al-Sharkiya in Minya, which is a Christian majority village, when Christians were playing a national song «Thanks to Their Hands.» The Christians had played the song that celebrates the ouster of former President Mohamed Morsi at the hands of the military during the arrival of Morsi’s supporters in cars in preparation for pro-Morsi demonstrations. The archbishops of Menia and Abu Qurqas issued a statement on August 3, listing the losses incurred by 43 citizens, including arson and the looting of homes, stores and vehicles. EIPR possesses a list of the names of the citizens confirmed to have been affected by these attacks.

Also in Minya, armed clashes erupted between the village of Beni-Ebeid (predominantly Christian) and the village of Hawarteh (predominantly Muslim), after one of the Christians from the former village – who owns land adjacent to the border between the two villages and near the residential area of Hawarteh – started to build a house. Residents of Hawarteh joined in a protest against the building of the house, as they did not want any Christians to live in their village. The clashes resulted in the death of four citizens among the aggressors, in addition to dozens of injured and the burning of a number of houses and private property.

By evaluating the above five groupings, it becomes clear that sectarian clashes where customary reconciliation is sought usually follows one of two main trajectories. The first is common in normal conflicts that are initiated by a dispute over finances, consensual relationships or harassment. They then later develop a sectarian dimension when people other than the main parties involved in the conflict join in to support either party based



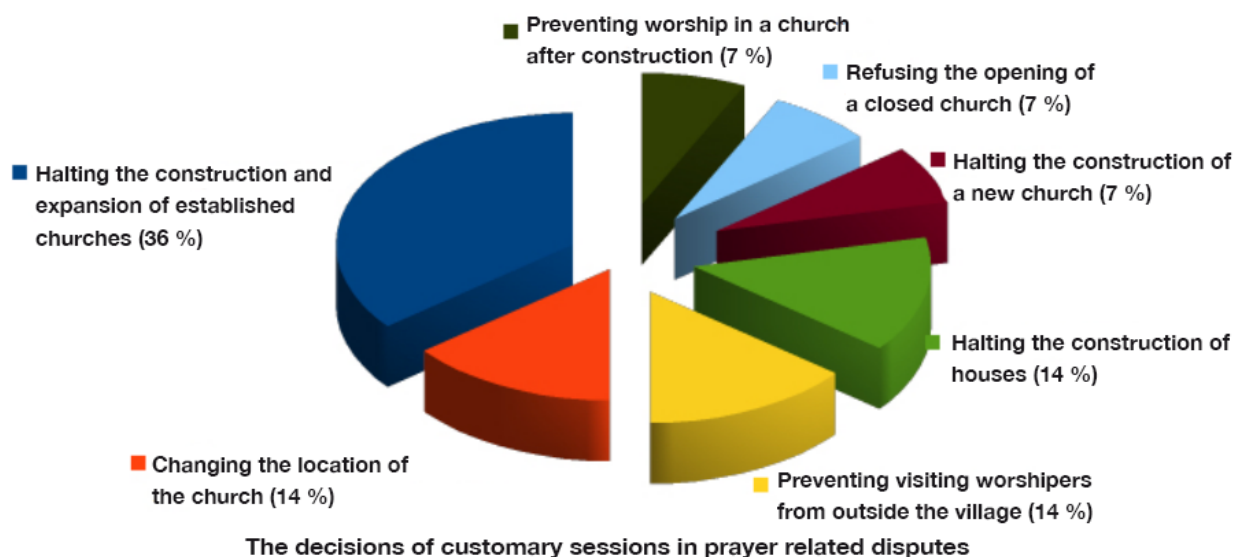
purely on religious affiliations. In such instances, religious mobilization is used after the problem takes place in order to undertake collective punishment against Copts and their properties. In some cases, crowds would also head to a nearby church to attack it, burn it or destroy parts of it. The second trajectory, however, starts with a sectarian dimension and retains that dimension in later stages. Examples of this are conflicts related to the practice of religious rituals, which residents might object to as well as the incidents known as “defamation of religions.” In these incidents, angry crowds would head directly to the church and attempt to break in or attack it. In many cases, the churches are surrounded and those wishing to pray are prevented from entering.

## The Results of Customary Sessions: Imposing Biased Outcomes

The decisions resulting from customary sessions have differed according to the cause of the problem as well as its consequences. Most of these decisions have not been in accordance with the rules known to govern in customary reconciliation when both parties are affiliated with the same religion. The decisions also did not apply consistently to the wrongdoers of different religions.

### Prayer is Prohibited by Customary Command

The decisions of the customary sessions regarding the conflicts over the building and restoration of churches have tended to favor the stronger side in disputes (Muslims) more than the weaker side (Copts). The weaker side has been frequently pressured to relinquish their legal rights, especially in cases where churches or the properties of Copts were attacked. These violations took the following forms:



- The expansion of five churches was halted. Instead, it was agreed that a fence surrounding the old area would be built to separate it from the adjacent areas. These churches are: St. George church in the village of Beni-Ahmed in Minya, St. George church in Ezbet Yaacoub in Bibawy, Minya, Azraa church in Kafr Atallah, Shar-kiya, St. George church in the village of Sarasna, Fayoum and St. Mina church in the village of Zara in Sohag.
- Two churches were moved to new locations. The first was in the village of Qamadi in Minya, where representatives of the Christian village's residents submitted an application to the authorities for demolishing the church and rebuilding it, since the old building was in bad condition. A number of the Muslims in the village and other neighboring villages objected. They surrounded the church and prevented people from entering. During the customary session, it was agreed to change the location to a place 200 meters away, since there is a mosque across from the church (the mosque was built after the church) such that the new building would occupy 240 square metres, consisting of one floor and would not have any external religious manifestations (a beacon or a bell). It was also stipulated that the church priest should be changed.
- The second church was St. George church in Tarshoub in Beni-Suef. A rumor had spread about the installation of a church bell on top of the church, so a crowd surrounded the church and prevented people from praying. A customary session was held which decided to move the church to another location and the building in the new location would only host a prayer hall.
- Preventing non-resident worshippers from praying in the village church and forcing them to move to further locations for prayer. This is how incidents in the villages of Ezbet Marco Tala in Beni-Suef and the village of Amereya in Alexandria unfolded.
- In one incident, the church was not permitted to open after it had been restored. This took place in the case of the Virgin Mary and Anba Ibram church in Ain Shams district in Cairo. Dr. Essam Sharaf, the former prime minister, had promised Coptic activists to re-open a number of churches that had been closed based on security agencies' orders. When the Copts of the area tried to open the building to prepare it for prayer, several Muslims objected. A customary session was held and it was decided not to open the church unless an official license was first obtained for the restoration of the church. The decision also stipulated that the church would not have any external religious manifestations.
- Two houses under construction were prevented from completion under the pretext that the owners were intending to turn them into churches for prayer. The two houses were in the villages of Awlad Khalaf and Nosayrat in Sohag. The owners pledged in a written statement not to use the buildings for other purposes.

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- The construction of the St. George church in Ezbet Yacoub al-Qibleya was halted. A stipulation about obtaining official permits was placed. Only when the written permit was obtained after months was it possible to go through with the construction of the church and to open it for worship.
  - The incident at St. George church in the village of Marinab in the north of Aswan represented a unique case. Although the Christian side accepted all the demands of the Muslims during the customary session, a large number of the Muslims in the village gathered to declare their objections to the building of the church. A few customary sessions were held. In the first session, the two parties agreed on three conditions: no crosses would be displayed on top of the church, no bells would be hung and no microphones placed on top of the church. They disagreed, however, over the fourth condition, which was to demolish the four domes of the church. The Christians rejected this. A second customary session was held, but it failed to contain the disputes between the residents of the village. In the third customary session, representatives of the Copts agreed to remove the domes over a 15-day period. However, before the end of this period, hundreds of Muslims, from the village as well as neighboring areas, attacked the church, set it on fire and destroyed parts of it. After this incident, Copt activists called for demonstrations in front of the Radio and Television building (Maspero) in Cairo. Demonstrators were attacked by the military police in an incident that led to the death of more than 25 Copts. After the Maspero incident, Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, the head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces at the time, decided to restore the situation to how it was before the attack. Even though this incident occurred many years ago, the church has not re-opened.
  - In another incident, disputes between Muslims and Christians developed over a consensual relationship between a Muslim woman and a Christian man, leading to an attack on the village church. A large number of Muslims from the village of Sol (Atfeeh district) in Giza set the church on fire and destroyed it completely. Over a few sessions, there were attempts to persuade the aggressors to abandon what remained of the occupied church building, but these attempts failed. After a few days, under the guidance of the Salafi leaders who were called upon by the Armed Forces, it was agreed that the church would be rebuilt and restored to its prior state, according to God's law (shar' Allah), and the agreement between the Sheikhs who participated in the session.
  - High-level leaders from the Armed Forces and the police participated in these sessions and sponsored the implementation of their decisions. In some cases, the agreement contained a stipulation that the church should obtain official approval before beginning religious rituals or the restoration of the church. Despite the participation of local authorities and security forces in the negotiations during the customary sessions, the approvals were not given – which could indicate the possibility that guarantees had been given to rep-

representatives of the Muslim community to accept the stipulation with the knowledge that the administrative entities would not grant the necessary approvals.

- Often the terms of the agreement included the relinquishment of legal procedures despite the occurrence of attacks against people and property. No suspect in the cases of the attacks on churches and property has ever been taken to trial, despite the existence of police reports and lists of suspects in a number of cases.

Overall, out of fourteen cases of sectarian tension over worship or the construction and renovation of churches, there have been decisions issued in favor of the Christians only in the case of the church in Ezbet Yacoub al-Qibleya, as indicated earlier.

## Everyone is Implicated, Honor Cases

In general, several consecutive sessions need to be held to resolve each incident. Sometimes, the sessions failed to put an end to sectarian attacks or to abate it, especially in incidents where there were instigators of violence. Decisions taken by the customary councils in these kinds of disputes can be divided into three groups:

### Group One: Decisions Concerning the Main Parties of the Dispute

- In three incidents, the decisions of the customary sessions were general, dictating the reconciliation between the two parties without texts referring to their specific situation, or to the attacks against the properties of Copts where applicable.
- In six cases, a decision was taken to relocate the person/people of concern. In a large number of cases, this decision concerned only one person (the Christian accused individual). In two cases, it was decided to relocate a Muslim woman. In other incidents, the decision to relocate was issued with regards to entire families that were not involved in the original dispute, but who defended their property at the time of the attack, and, as a result, were considered to be involved in the problem and were expelled from their homes. For example, a customary reconciliation session resulted in the decision to expel five households belonging to the same extended family of Ebaskheron in the village of Sharbat in Amereya. The decision was changed later in favor of them staying. In all cases of expulsion, it was the Christian party that was accused of the attack, sexual harassment, or having a full sexual relationship with a Muslim woman. The process of expulsion was accompanied by forcing those expelled to sell their properties. In other cases, the minutes of the sessions showed that the council – which included Muslim members of the village who were involved in commercial competition with the expelled Christians – were allowed to supervise the sale of the properties, as the owner has no right to act without the presence of the council.

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- In all cases where the accused was Christian, the arbitrators decided that it was necessary to complete the legal procedures against them. Some of the suspects had surrendered to the police and others were arrested. Moreover, the public prosecutor released suspects either for lack of evidence over their involvement, or because forensic reports were issued in their favor.
  - The public prosecutor's office did not accept the customary session's decision in one case, where it referred the defendant accusing of cutting a Copt's ear in Qena to trial. He was acquitted after a reconciliation report was issued to the court following pressure for his family to relocate. In the end, the family accepted reconciliation and waived their rights during the court proceedings.
  - Customary sessions imposed financial penalties on the Christian side in two cases, in addition to the decision to expel and continue with legal procedures against them. In the first case, a Christian man was accused of assaulting a Muslim girl. However, the medical examination failed to prove the occurrence of sexual assault. As a result, the customary council decided to fine the Christian man LE25,000, to be paid to the child's family and to sell the property where the incident allegedly took place, in addition to continuing to pursue legal procedures against him. In the second incident, the family of a Christian man, who was in a consensual relationship with a Muslim woman, was fined LE150,000, in addition to the expulsion of the Christian man, his family and the Muslim woman.

#### Group Two: Decisions Concerning Collective Punishment of Copts in a Given Region

Compensation for the victims was agreed upon in only three cases. The first incident occurred in the village of Qalusna (Samalot district) where the decision was issued to repair damages. On the other hand, the terms of agreement resulting from a third session – arranged by a parliamentary council to remedy the effects of a customary session that was held to expel eight Christian families – stated that compensation be awarded to the Copts of the village of Sharbat after they were attacked. However, the ruling did not spell out any specific entity to compensate the Copts or the amount of that compensation. The Church handed out assistance to the residents, while the state offered none. In one incident, there was an explicit decision to fine the aggressors in the incident that took place in the village of Menbal (Matay district) the amount of LE100,000, which the Coptic party later relinquished. In a small number of cases, the security forces arrested suspects in cases of attacks or collective punishment. However, they were later released after reconciliation reports were submitted to the public prosecutor.

### Group Three: Decisions Concerning the Attacks on Churches

In one case, the perpetrator of attacks on a church in the village of Menbal was fined LE200,000 for the damages caused. Church officials later relinquished the amount after the decision of the council was issued. As for the case of the church in the village of Sol (Atfeeh district), it was rebuilt after the approval of some of the Salafi sheikhs at the request of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. The problem had started when knowledge of a consensual sexual relationship between a Christian man and Muslim woman drove angry Muslims to organize rallies in the village, attacking a number of Copts' houses. A customary session was arranged quickly, which resulted in the decision to expel the Christian man and sell his property. The furniture of his house was moved and a "for sale" sign was placed on the house. However, a fight erupted between the father of the Muslim woman and his relatives, who demanded that he kill the Christian man as well as his own daughter. The father refused to comply and instead facilitated his daughter's departure from the house. The fight escalated into an exchange of gunshots and led to the death of a young man from the family. During his funeral procession in the cemetery, there was incitement to attack the houses of Copts, as well as the village church, which was looted and destroyed. In the wake of the church's destruction, guards from the military police, who were there for days, refused to intervene to arrest the aggressors. Demonstrations took place at Maspero condemning the incidents at Masn the face of mounting pressure, the state institutions intervened and announced the reconstruction of the church at the expense of the Armed Forces – something that was rejected by the aggressors, who demanded that the church be moved outside the village. The Coptic demonstrators and church leadership rejected the leadingayed of the (who was governing the country at the time) to seekthead sought the advice of well-known Salafi sheikhs, who decided in favor of building the church.

It was common in the incidents where churches were attacked not to arrest any suspects. In a small number of cases, suspects were arrested and later released by the public prosecutor, even though some had had formal reports filed against them with security authorities and the public prosecutor. Such reports are documented with video segments that prove the suspects' involvement in the attacks. However, police forces did not arrest any of them or refer them to the public prosecutor for interrogation.

### No Freedom of Expression in Matters of Religion

The first decision resulting from customary sessions when a Christian man is accused of defamation of religion is to continue to pursue legal proceedings against the suspect along with offering an apology to the residents of the village for his wrongdoing. Other decisions were as follows:

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In five cases, it was decided to expel either the Christian man only or the entire family.

- Expelling 23 people in the incident of a Christian man from Ezbet Shakir in Minya “liking” a Facebook post. The expulsion included the man, a number of members of his family and his siblings’ families, as well as his father.
- Expelling two families from Assuit permanently in the wake of a dispute that arose when student, Gamal Abdo Massoud, shared a photo on Facebook. The family of student Mina Gamal Bishay, who shared Massoud’s desk in their high school of Manqabad, was also expelled.
- Expelling two young men from the village of Abu Sidhom in Samalot. The first, who works in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, shared a Facebook photo that the residents of the village considered offensive to Islam. The second young man, who used to live in the same village, was expelled because he “liked” the Facebook post.
- Expelling Fouad Dawood from the village of Radisseya in Edfu, north of Aswan, his wife and his children permanently. Expelling three of his siblings and their families for a month, after which they returned to the village.
- Expelling the pharmacist Moemen Magdy from the village of Saft Abu Garg, Matay in Minya, shutting down the pharmacy he owned and selling it later.

In these incidents, those expelled were forced to sell their property. However, in the case of Ezbet Shakir, a decision was issued to prohibit the renting or selling of the property, houses and agricultural land. It was agreed in the minutes of the customary session to consider any contract that preceded the date of the session to be void. This family later returned to the village, with the exception of the young man, after two years when another customary session was held in October 2013. In one incident, a decision for expulsion was taken in addition to a financial penalty for two people who were said to have fought with Muslims over the Facebook “liking” incident.

- An administrative decision was taken to suspend a university student from Assuit University dorms over a religious discussion.
- The expulsion of a priest from Ezbet Marco village, on the grounds that he had not apologized to the Muslims of the village when two children were accused of defacing a copy of the Quran.
- Shutting down a reception hall in the village of Mahameed Bahary that was used as a religious study hall by Christians.

In a number of incidents, the participants in the customary sessions placed conditions, demanding that the Christian clergy give an official apology, even when they were not involved at all in the incident. This included the incident that was held under the auspices of the governor of Assuit and the security director, where the archbishops of Assuit were forced to formally apologize to the Muslims of the city over the incident.

In three incidents, the civil, administrative and security actions were considered sufficient, without further legal procedures. The public prosecutor dealt with five cases, including one where the accused was released without a lawsuit. However, three defendants had court rulings issued against them of various durations ranging from one to six years. Another ruling stipulated handing over two children to their parents.

## Customary Sessions in Everyday Fights: Obvious Discrimination

Although this category of tensions is not as fraught as other kinds of disputes related to the building of churches or freedom of expression regarding religious matters, for example, they nonetheless still issue decisions that are contrary to customary norms. The common observations on these sessions, which were convened after murder cases were as follows:

- In cases when the murdered person was Christian, no commitment to the shroud (kafan) offering or paying of the blood money (diya) was shown. The sessions in such cases only stipulated reconciliation and a call for friendliness to prevail among the residents. A good example of this was the reconciliation session in the village of Nazlet Farag Allah. However, in cases when the murdered person is a Muslim, then a commitment of offering the shroud and the payment of the blood money was followed through. This contradicts with customs, as there should be no discrimination between perpetrators based on religion. For example, in Matareya, it was stipulated that the Christian family that was accused of murdering a Muslim offer five shrouds and five calves in an obvious signal that the life of a Muslim man is equal to that of five Copts. It was also agreed that the Copts would have to give a hundred camels as well as donate 234 square metres of land, in addition to a million pounds towards the building of a mosque and an orphanage for the Islamic Association (Al-Jam'iyah al-Shar'iyah al-Islamiyah). Moreover, the terms also included the expulsion of the 62 members of the Christian suspect's family from the neighborhood of Matareya and their properties sold within a maximum period of six months.
- The customary session that was held in the village of Dahshour focused on dealing with the ramifications of the attacks without citing the murder. Later, the Muslim family avenged the death by murdering a member of the Christian family. In a later session, it was agreed to consider the avenged killing as a resolution and reconciliation was reached in the two cases: the murders of the Muslim and the Christian men.



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- No financial penalties or compensation were levied for the damages caused to citizens' properties, especially for citizens who were not one of the parties to the dispute. The governorate of Giza offered financial assistance of LE10,000 to those who sustained damages during the incident, which was separate from the terms of the customary reconciliation session.
  - In incidents when the murdered individual was Christian, the perpetrators were not arrested. Moreover, the public prosecutor accepted the minutes of the reconciliation sessions and released those arrested in incidents involving the arson of houses and property. For example, in the attack on the Copts of the village of Tayeba, the prosecutor released the suspects after they had initially arrested a number of people from both sides. In two other cases where a Muslim was killed, the public prosecutor referred two Christian defendants to trial. In one of these cases, the court acquitted the defendants after reconciliation reports were submitted. In the second incident, thirteen Christian are still pending trial over the killing of a Muslim in Matareya in front of Cairo Criminal Court.
  - In incidents of attacks on church properties, the church was ordered to pay compensation on behalf of the aggressors. In the incident of the break-in of the building belonging to the archbishops of Bibba in Beni-Suef, two customary sessions were held. The first one ruled that the building falls under the rightful ownership of the archbishops. In the second, it was stipulated that the archbishops pay LE200,000 for the aggressors who had occupied the building, in order to evacuate it. In the incident concerning control over the land of the monastery of Anba Tadros al-Mashriqy, a session was held in which the monastery decided to buy 3000 square metres of land as a donation for public use: half to be used to build a school in the center of the village and half for a youth center. Despite the agreement, the dispute continued until the end of 2014, when the state removed the aggressors and enforced the donation.
  - In the incident of the Macarius Monastery, the priests were the aggressors on the land of the nature reserve of Wadi Rayyan. After several skirmishes, an agreement was reached between the church, the Environment Ministry and a number of representatives of the neighboring Arab tribes. The agreement stipulated the opening of five gates in the fence surrounding the land and the monastery, to maintain the current state of the buildings, that the land could not be cultivated for environmental reasons and that the area's residents have the right to develop the land and use its fruit.

## Customary Sessions to the Background of Political Clashes: No Rights for the Victims

A customary reconciliation session was held over the incident in the village of Beni-Ahmed al-Sharqeya at the home of former Member of Parliament (on behalf of the dissolved National Democratic Party), Alaa al-Sebeay. Major General Osama Deif, the general secretary for the governorate and representatives from five villages (Beni-Ahmed al-Sharqeya, Beni-Ahmed al-Gharbeya, Reida, Orban and Awam) along with a number of representatives holding senior positions in the governorate attended the session. The arbitration council consisted of seven members, five of whom were affiliated with the Islamic group (Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya): Sheikh Othman al-Semman, one of the group's leaders, the religious advocate, Ragab Hassan, the person in charge of Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya in Minya and Doctor Gamal al-Hilali, Secretary General of the Building and Development Party and Engineer Ismail Ahmed. The remaining attendees were Alaa Saber, Hajj Awad Aqeela and Hajj Ali Mohamed Younes. The terms of the agreement were:

- Accepting the arbitration council.
- Relinquishing all lawsuits and police reports.
- Imposing a penalty of LE2 million on the aggressors. The implementation of this penalty was up to the council, and was based on witness statements or oaths of payment.
- Whoever causes a rift between the people of one village would be expelled from the village with the consent of both sides after the council issues a decision to this effect.
- Composing an eight-member council from the village's residents that would contain any disputes before they develop.
- No fights or quarrels to occur near places of worship, such as mosques and churches, and the consideration of such places as a red line.
- This reconciliation deals with past disputes and presents a new clean slate.

As for the incident in the village of Rahmaneya in Qena, the council called "House of the Family» (Bait al-'Aila) in Nag' Hammadi Council held a meeting to enforce peace between Christians and Muslims. Bishop Kirolos of Nag' Hammadi, Sheikh Ahmed Abdel Latif, director of the Directorate of Religious Endowments in Nag' Hammadi, and other Muslim, Christian and popular leaders attended the session. They discussed a marginal incident and did not address the prevention of Copts from voting in elections or the attacks against them. The participants focused on the accusation against Shenouda Finhas for defacing a copy of the Quran. It was agreed to prevent the accused from working at the barbershop he owned and that his brother Mina, or whomever else

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he wishes, should manage the shop in his place. The main witness later retracted his statement about seeing the accused Christian man defacing a copy of the Quran. However, when Mina Finhas tried to re-open the shop, a crowd of Muslims from the village prevented him from doing so.

## Finally, Preventing Citizens from Leaving their Homes!

A customary reconciliation session was held on Saturday December 14 against the backdrop of clashes between two neighboring villages following the prevention of a Christian man from building on his own land. The clashes had ended with the death of four people on both sides. The customary session was held in the neighboring village of Arab al-Sheikh Mohamed under the auspices of the security director in Minya, Major General Osama Metwally, and the council of Arab tribes and executive leaders from the governorates. The resulting terms of agreement contained controversial conditions:

- The Copts of the village of Nazlet Ebeid are not to build on the land they own, which borders the village of Hawarteh. Instead, the land (in Hawarteh) is to be exchanged with one of the conflicting parties in the village of Nazlet Ebeid.
- The Copts are to pay blood money (diya) for the two murdered Copts and the Muslims are to pay the blood money for the families of the two murdered Muslims.
- The residents are not to enter the village of Hawarteh through the western bridge indefinitely.
- A payment of LE1 10,000 is to be jointly by the Muslims and Christians. This is the price of a car belonging to one of the Copts from the village of Nazlet Farag Allah that borders the village of Hawarteh. Muslims from Hawarteh had set the car on fire when it was coincidentally passing in front of the village.
- The Copts of Nazlet Ebeid are not to go out of the village, even to work, for 15 days after the reconciliation.
- Relinquishing all legal and civil rights, and that the two sides refrain from antagonizing one another.

## Why do People Accept Customary Sessions' Rulings Despite the Harm Done?

In the following section, we provide some reasons why people accept the results of customary sessions, according to various testimonies obtained by EIPR in different cases:

- The construction of social relationships that dominate in rural Egypt and in informal areas on the outskirts of cities, which is significantly different than relationships inside cities. Village societies are governed by specific customs, traditions and behaviors. They are relatively closed societies, in which the residents are generally personally acquainted with one another. Financial, commercial and social relationships between Muslims and Christians in villages are often closely intertwined, and extend over long periods of time. This curtails the possibility of settling matters legally, especially considering that entire families are affected by the outcomes. The scope of the problem extends beyond the individual and the household to the family and religious sect.
- The weakness of state institutions, and their inability to perform their duty in maintaining societal peace and protecting the lives and property of citizens, leads some citizens to resort to these sessions as a way to resolve conflicts and to settle disputes out of fear of any aggravation or severe repercussions, especially in light of the different manifestations and forms of sectarian and religious tensions witnessed in several governorates. In a large number of cases, as soon as any symptoms of tension between Muslims and Christians emerge, mobilization on the basis of religious identity takes place, which often threatens to spread to neighboring villages. This is particularly evident in cases related to emotional relationships between Christian men and Muslim women and especially in predominantly Christian villages. Religious mobilization is employed in neighboring villages declaring the need to avenge the honor of the Muslims who have been insulted or to rescue the Muslims of a village who are being attacked by Christians. This pattern is common in Upper Egypt, especially in Minya. For example, clashes took place between Muslims and Christians in the village of Beni-Ahmed al-Sharkiya, so Muslims from the neighboring villages mobilized crowds using cars from nearby villages and headed towards the village where the attacks took place. This occurred in other cases including the village of Nazlet Farag Allah, Rayermoon al-Bayadeya and others. Therefore, the weaker parties – usually the Copts – agree with the decision of the state agencies to resort to customary sessions. Copts resort to customary sessions out of fear of repercussions that could stem from attacks and out of fear that clashes might spread to new areas, especially in light of the lack of trust in the security services and state institutions. Customary sessions attempt to impose a temporary calm and prevent the spread of attacks to neighboring areas, which could make the attacks difficult to control and multiply the losses.

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- The more that citizens lose confidence in the neutrality of the security apparatus and their ability to enforce the rule of law, the less they believe in the justice system. Additionally, the procedures have often been very slow, taking years for the persons harmed to redeem their rights, even in cases that rule in their favor. As a result, customary interventions provide quick solutions for reparation. For cases that include compensation, the procedures in customary interventions are generally faster and much more reflective of the damages and losses incurred than normal legal procedures.
  - Some incidents may result in minimal material damage, but lead to a significant psychological burden and a violation of human dignity. In such incidents, customary reconciliation could be more capable of addressing this damage. For example, when a person directs degrading or religious insults at another, or assaults them in a minor physical manner, filing a report at the police station would not result in a speedy end to the dispute, since the investigation process usually takes a long time. Even if the report is referred to court, there is no guarantee that justice will be served in a timely manner. However, customary reconciliation sessions are held only days after the incident and the perpetrator is forced to offer an apology to the person harmed. This arrangement helps in calming sectarian tensions.

In a number of cases, customary interventions achieved their goals by imposing calm and preventing the escalation of sectarian violence. Such examples include:

- The customary session held in the village of Ezbet Marco (in Fashn district), south of Beni-Suef, put a stop to the incitement against Christians after two uneducated children were accused of defacing a copy of the Quran. A customary session resulted in an apology regarding the incident and it was agreed to accept the continuation of legal procedures. After Friday prayers the next day, a number of sheikhs from outside the village arrived and called upon the Muslims to attack the Christians and teach them a lesson. Most of the Muslims of the village rejected the call and calmly asked the sheikhs to leave, since the matter was in the hands of the law.
- After accusing a Christian man of attacking a girl in Zawya al-Hamra, dozens of residents met at the nearby Al-Nazeer mosque. Reverend Gerges Nesry visited the mosque as soon as he knew about the incident and held a customary session with a number of sheikhs from the area. The child's family decided to allow the suspect to be tried legally for the crime he committed. The agreement included the stipulation that the suspect sell the building where the incident took place (market price) to any interested buyer and be fined LE25,000, to be paid to the child's family in compensation for the defamation of the girl.

The next day, some sheikhs tried to provoke the girl's family to attack Coptic homes in the region. However, the girl's family and the sheikh of the mosque intervened to diffuse the situation.

- Residents from the village of Rayermoon attacked some Christian residents in the village of Bayadeya (predominantly Christian) when rumors spread that the Christians were preventing the Muslims from praying in the mosque. After several reports were filed, the security forces were quick to hold a number of customary sessions. The agreements resulting from these sessions stipulated doing no harm, offering "love and friendliness" and placed a financial penalty clause of LE500,000 on whichever side breached the contract. The agreement also contained a unique clause that was not included in any other customary session: "organize common activities between the two villages, such as a soccer tournament and other cultural activities." Customary sessions were held in both villages, thus sending a message to all residents that the dispute had ended.

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# Roles of Involved Actors: Supporting Customs at the Expense of Law

## Security Forces

The security vacuum in the wake of January 2011, and the failure of the security services to intervene rapidly to confront sectarian tensions and prevent their escalation to sectarian violence, contributed to the increasing resort to customary reconciliation sessions, as we mentioned earlier. In many of these sessions, the leadership of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) asked leaders of Islamic groups to intervene and negotiate with the aggressors to urge them to stop their attacks in return for guarantees that they would not be legally prosecuted. In general, one can say that the security forces were always late to arrive to the sites of sectarian attacks, and failed to intervene adequately once they arrived. In some cases, their attempts to intervene failed to curtail the escalation of these acts of aggression. Security officers, moreover, have frequently shut down churches as soon as a problem about their restoration has arisen, and given direct commands to the Copts not to pray in the churches in question. Additionally, security forces have prevented citizens from continuing the construction of their houses as soon as there were rumors about the possibility of using the building as a church for prayer, or for other religious services. A number of attacks were also accompanied by random acts of arrests and detention in equal number on both sides, regardless of each's role in the attacks. This was done in order to exert pressure on people to accept customary reconciliation. At the same time, however security forces did not arrest the aggressors either during the attacks, or later after arrest warrants were issued by the public prosecutor, when reports were filed against the aggressors.

As for the customary sessions themselves, security forces played different roles, such as being honorary participants, holding sessions at the headquarters of police departments or the Security Directorate, or fully sponsoring sessions and participating in reaching agreements. In some sessions, they participated in issuing decisions that were contrary to the law and that included clear violations of the rights of the more vulnerable party. Security forces also played a negative role regarding the building of churches, forcing the Christian residents,

in many cases, to halt the restoration of a number of churches, as well as prayer and worship in renovated churches and the expansion of some churches. Instead, they forced Christians to wait for security permits that they never granted.

During the transitional period, when the military took over the duties of maintaining security after the revolution of January 2011, the security and military leadership often resorted to asking for help from Salafi leaders in persuading the aggressors to stop the attacks, in return for a guarantee of non-prosecution. We recall here two examples that are telling of the role of the security apparatus in consolidating customary sessions as a solution by turning to the leaders of the Salafi currents. The first is the incident of the destruction of the church of the two martyrs in the village of Sol (Atfeeh district), south of Cairo. The looting and destruction of the church took place over three days in the presence of the Armed Forces that showed up at the church as soon as the attacks started. Repeated calls for help failed to persuade security forces to intervene. After pressure from Coptic demonstrators in several regions and after sectarian clashes took place causing the death of at least 15 citizens in Mansheyet Naser neighborhood in Cairo, the Armed Forces negotiated with the leadership of the groups that attacked the church. The governor of Helwan at the time, Qadry Hussein, declared that he was responding to the demands of the angry demonstrators and that he had decided to move the church outside the village after a customary session was held without any Christian representation from the village. The Coptic demonstrators rejected the governor's response and they blocked the road in front of the radio and television building (Maspero). The church leadership also rejected the response, leading SCAF to turn to a number of Salafi sheikhs to persuade the aggressors to leave the area. In the presence of the leadership of the Central Military Region, a number of these sheikhs, led by Mohamed Hassan, held a customary session, after which it was announced that the sheikh and the people of the village would accept the building of the church, according to what Sheikh Hassan called "the rules of God's law" (ahkam al-Shar'). The agreement stipulated in its seventh article that "according to the general rules of the laws of God Almighty and the advisory opinion of the scholars mentioned below, the SCAF decided on the construction of the church of Sol in its same location and on the same area of land at the expense of the Armed Forces and under the supervision of the Engineering Authority of the Armed Forces starting tomorrow Sunday 13 March, 2011". This agreement enabled the inciters and aggressors in this incident to evade punishment. No one was arrested and the public persecutor did not refer the case to court.

The second incident took place in March 2011 in Qena, when a number of members of the Salafi current assaulted a Coptic citizen for leasing an apartment to a woman the aggressors claimed had a "bad reputation." The attackers set the apartment on fire and assaulted the citizen by beating him and cutting off part of his ear, before contact-



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ing security to inform the police that they had «applied the law of God on this infidel and that the police should come and enforce the law.» Rather than arrest the attackers and apply the law, the military governor of Qena held a customary reconciliation session with the Salafi leaders after pressuring the Coptic citizen into relinquishing the complaint he had filed against the aggressors. Those same leaders led a wave of protests against the appointment of a Christian citizen as governor only a month later. They were then sent a number of religious leaders, who previously aided the customary session over the incident of the destruction of Sol church, in order to convince them to accept the new governor. However, after this visit, the Salafi leader announced that the people of Qena rejected the appointment of the governor. The government bowed to this pressure and halted the appointment of the Coptic governor, who was expelled in the first ministerial change – without him ever setting foot in the governorate of Qena.

The third incident is the destruction of the church of St. George in the village of Marinab in Aswan. For the twenty-day duration of the incident, from the beginning of tensions until the destruction of the church, the security forces, including the security director and the head of the investigative unit, took part in the process of finding customary solutions. Several customary sessions were held. In the last session, the representatives of the Copts of the village accepted all of the demands from the Muslim side: not to place any crosses, bells or microphones on top of the church and to demolish the six domes. Despite this, the church was attacked, set on fire and parts of it were destroyed without any interference from the forces that were guarding the building or those that showed up later.

## The Role of the Public Prosecutor

The Public Prosecutor is considered to be the lawyer for the people, representing public interest and applying the law. It is the entity that has the authority to investigate criminal reports, with the power to adjourn or refer them to court. However, in most of the attacks on the property of Copts, the suspects were not referred to court, while prison sentences were issued only in cases when the offending party was Christian. From a total of eight attacks on churches and church related buildings, a decision to imprison suspects was issued in only three incidents. The suspects were later released and their cases were not referred to court.

In incidents when a Christian man was accused of sexually harassing a Muslim woman, the suspect was arrested and later released. In contrast, no suspects in incidents of collective violence on Coptic property and places of worship were referred to court. The public prosecutor dealt with five cases of defamation of religion, where only one suspect was released without a lawsuit, while four cases were referred to court, with three suspects receiving prison sentences ranging from one to six years. Two children were handed to their parents according to legal procedures. No suspects, however, were referred to court in incidents of assaults on Copts.

In these incidents, the public prosecutor relied on customary reconciliation to halt criminal proceedings in violation of the Criminal Procedure Code, which exhaustively specifies crimes for which reconciliation is acceptable. The first article of the law states: «Only the public prosecutor, and no other entity, is entitled to raise and direct criminal proceedings except in the circumstances set out in the law. The proceedings are not to be abandoned, halted or impeded, except in the circumstances set out in the law.»

In article ten of the same law, the legislator gives the victim or the complainant the right to relinquish raising criminal proceedings, but only in specific cases. The article states, “The person who filed the complaint or the motion in the preceding articles, and the victim in the crime stipulated in Article 185 of the penal code and the crimes stipulated in articles 302, 306, 307 and 308 of the same law, if a public official or someone assigned to public service, and the reason for committing the crime was due to job performance, representation or general service, to waive the complaint or motion any time before a final ruling has been issued and that the criminal motion would expire upon waiving. In the case of multiple victims, the waiving is not valid unless issued by all plaintiffs. Waiving against one defendant is considered a waiver for the remaining defendants, if the plaintiff has died, the right for waiving does not move on to his inheritors except in cases of adultery where each of the sons of the husband has the right to relinquish, after which the law suit expires.”

The Penal Code does not include looting and arson of homes, which are punishable by life imprisonment or the death penalty, if accompanied by killing or death, along with premeditated murder, and possession of firearms and intimidation and threatening of citizens.

Although many of the victims, and their families, have, in several instances, presented names of suspects along with video segments for the assaults, where faces and names of the participants are visible, the public prosecutor opted to accept reconciliation in some of them, released the suspects and shelved the investigation without taking any serious steps towards prosecution.

For example, in an incident of sectarian violence in the village of Sol, where a number of houses were set on fire, in addition to the destruction of the village church, different video segments were presented by the victims, as well as by satellite channels that covered the incidents. However, the public prosecutor did not conclude the investigation and did not oblige security forces to arrest the suspects or the inciters. As a result, no criminal proceedings were initiated.

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## The Role of Religious Institutions: Intervention after Reconciliation

Organizers of many customary sessions were keen on the attendance of representatives of religious leaders, especially from Al-Azhar and the Church. Usually the presence of religious clergy is used to calm tensions between citizens after the customary council reaches a decision, by delivering religious sermons in mosques and churches in which the leaders call for tolerance, co-existence and renouncing violence.

There are some cases, however, where the Church refused to attend sessions. For example, representatives of the Diocese of Minya and Abu Qurqas refused to attend the reconciliation session between the villages of Nazlet Obeid (predominantly Christian) and Hawarteh (Muslim majority), following the killing of four civilians – two from each side – fearing that the resulting terms of agreement might be unfair. The organizers called on a priest from Assuit to attend the session and thus give the impression that the church consented to the agreement. As a result, the Diocese of Minya issued a statement denying its participation in the session and declaring its surprise at the priest's participation. Moreover, the Diocese of Assuit issued a statement declaring that the priest had participated without its knowledge and that he had already been suspended.

In other cases, the intervention of religious clergy succeeded in containing sectarian tensions. For example, following the accusation of two children in the village of Ezbet Marco in Beni-Suef for defacing a copy of the Quran, the residents of the village held a session in which the Christians offered an apology for the incident. They agreed to handle the issue under the law. A committee from Al-Azhar and the Religious Endowments Ministry visited the village and issued a statement calling for co-existence and the protection of Coptic property. On the following Friday, dozens of Salafis from outside the village visited and tried to incite the residents to attack the Christians in a religious sermon. This was rejected by most of the Muslims of the village, who asked the visitors to leave. There are other cases in which Muslim religious clergy succeeded in curtailing the escalation of sectarian tension and avoiding the escalation of conflicts. The incidents at Wasti and Kom Ombo are good examples. People angry at the departure of two Muslim girls from their homes, under the pretext of converting to Christianity, arranged demonstrations where they tried to attack churches in the two cities. The intervention of religious leadership, along with the provision of a security zone around the churches by the security forces, protected the church from the attacks and decreased tensions, especially when the two girls returned.

## Customary Rulings: Violation of Rights

Customary sessions in cases of sectarian conflict have deviated from the expected course for such rulings, away from their well-known rules and regulations. In general, customary sessions in incidents of sectarian assaults did not follow a standard rule. This, coupled with the readiness of the public prosecution to accept the results of these sessions, even when they contradict the law, and the prosecution's inclination to halt investigations in most cases, as mentioned earlier, has led to a situation where customary sessions often result in the violation of human rights protected by legislation and the Constitution as well as due process. Every citizen has the right to resort to courts without discrimination and the right to a fair trial. For this to occur, there must be a competent and impartial tribunal that guarantees equal legal opportunities for the two conflicting parties. The rulings, as well as the grounds for conviction or acquittal, need to be transparent, as well as the processes by which punishments or penalties have been determined. Such processes should not violate the international standards for fair trials; no punishment should be considered except in accordance with legal texts, and the penalty should be proportionate to the individual's crime. The violations resulting from customary sessions and rulings could be summarized as follows:

### Ruling in Favor of Discrimination: Absence of Equality

The ways in which members of customary councils are selected, as well as the rulings resulting from these sessions, reflect the balance of power and influence prevailing on the ground. The desire to impose rapid calm and the fear of escalating violence casts a shadow over the decisions of customary sessions. They tend to favor the stronger party at the expense of the weaker one, i.e. the Christian party in most instances. State authorities often exert pressure on the weaker side to accept to take part in customary sessions and bypass regular judicial mechanisms.

Even though acceptance is the primary condition for the two parties to seek customary reconciliation, we find that in cases of sectarian conflict, pressure or threats are often used to persuade the representatives of the

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Christian side to accept customary reconciliation. Such pressure has included threatening Christians with more attacks if they continue to seek legal proceedings. At other times, Christians have faced pressure from local community actors to accept the results of the reconciliation. State authorities, such as security forces and the local governor, have often played a role by using their authority to pressure citizens, either through random arrests or by cracking down on them in other areas. For example, the authorities have attempted at times to restrict the share of supplies and provisions or manipulated the local council concerning issuing construction permits. These pressures have led to the participation of members who do not represent the original wronged party, to the extent that representatives from other governorates have been called upon to attend sessions in order to give a false impression that the customary session is more representative than it is.

The significant incident in Minya, that we mentioned earlier, where firearm clashes took place between residents of the predominantly Muslim Hawarteh village and the predominantly Christian village of Beni-Ebeid, is a clear example of the conduct of customary sessions. The clashes took place on November 28, 2013, over the rejection of some of Hawarteh's Muslim residents to a Christian man selling a house on his rightfully owned land along the borders of the neighboring village. The violence resulted in the death of four people on both sides, in addition to the injury of dozens of others and setting fire to a number of Coptic houses. A customary reconciliation session was held on Saturday December 14, in the neighboring village of Arab al-Sheikh Mohamed. When the church refused to participate, a priest from Assuit was called on to participate in order to give the impression that the church was represented. This led the bishop of Minya, Macarius, to issue an official statement to the effect that the archbishop and the Christian religious leadership refused to participate in the session, which they viewed as a denial of their legal rights. The statement clarified that the priest from Assuit who attended the session did not get permission to attend, and that they knew nothing of his affiliations nor his reasons for attendance. The statement made clear that this priest's attendance should not be taken as acceptance on the part of the archbishop of these sessions, explaining that Copts are forced to accept such customary sessions due to the absence of the state's authority.

In addition to exerting pressure on Coptic citizens to participate in customary sessions, the rulings have usually been biased in favor of the stronger party and are hence more reflective of their interests. This is clear in the incidents in the predominantly Christian village of Beni-Ahmed al-Sharkiya, in which the village residents clashed with demonstrators supporting ousted President Mohamed Morsi. Hundreds of Muslims from neighboring villages took part in the clashes, resulting in the injury of 15 people, in addition to damaging property belonging to 43 citizens, including the looting and burning of houses, stores and vehicles. After the clashes, on

the afternoon of Sunday August 11, 2013, a customary reconciliation session was held at the home of a former Member of Parliament (dissolved NDP representative) Alaa al-Sebeay. Also in attendance were Major General Osama Deif, secretary general of the governorate and representatives of five villages (Beni-Ahmed al-Sharkiya, Beni-Ahmed al-Gharbiya, Reida, Orban and Awam), along with a number of religious and governmental representatives. The arbitration council consisted of seven members, five of whom were affiliated with the Islamic group (Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya). The session decided not to compensate the Copts and to force them to waive their complaints against the aggressors, whom they named in the complaints. Things did not end there: a verbal battle broke out between the leadership of Minya and the leadership of Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya over who should be credited with reaching the reconciliation. The governorate of Minya issued a statement after the session, in which it claimed the secretary general of the governorate was responsible for ending the conflict. This angered members of Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya, who, in turn issued a statement confirming that they had "intervened in the process of reconciliation between the Muslims and Christians in the village of Beni-Ahmed and that they were able to broker reconciliation in cooperation with the faithful sons of the village and the neighboring villages." The executive leaders played no part in the process, in contradiction to the content of their own statement. "We wish the issue had taken place within a framework of patriotism away from personal interests or gains." In a telephone conversation with one of Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya's participants in the customary session, he explained that he was later informed that some Muslims had exerted pressure on the Christians to force them to resort to reconciliation. He added that they were threatened that they would end up with no rights at all if they pursued a legal path. This threat exploited the fears of the Coptic community in the fragile security environment that prevailed after the ouster of Morsi.

Often the rulings of customary sessions were against the norms known to exist in similar situations in which the two conflicting parties shared the same religious affiliation. Similarly, the rulings differed according to whether the offending party was Muslim or Christian. Reconciliation councils did not adhere to customary norms and tended to go against these norms in issues concerning sectarian conflicts, sometimes in an obvious discriminatory manner. For example, on February 11, 2014, an everyday fight erupted between Mohamed Abdel Aziz and his brother Sayed Abdel Aziz, and members of the Christian Hitler family in Matereya in Cairo. The former had thrown quantities of cement and bricks in front of a furniture store owned by a member of the Christian family. Members of the Muslim family gathered supporters in front of the Christian family's house and started to fire random gunshots. Members of the Christian family also responded by firing shots. The clashes ended with the death of Hamdy Abbas, a member of the Muslim family. The security forces arrested twelve members of the Christian Hitler and Zaghlool families, who are related by marriage. Case number 1241

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for 2014 was filed in Matareya police station. The security forces asked members of the two Christian families to leave the area and to close down their shops (more than 12 different shops and a gas station). On June 9, 2014, a reconciliation session was held in Matereya sports club under the auspices of the security agencies. Major General Yehia al-Iraqy, deputy to Cairo security chief and Major General Khalid Youssef, deputy Chief of Cairo, as well as the director of the investigation unit north of Cairo, the head of Matareya police station and other security leaders, attended the session. Other religious and Islamic leadership and representatives of Al-Jam'iyah al-Shar'iyah also attended.

The terms of agreement resulting from the sessions were:

- The Christian family was asked to present five shrouds and five calves.
- Presenting a hundred camels according to the principle of blood money stipulated in Islam.
- The Christian side was asked to donate a 234 metre squared piece of land and a million pounds to the building of a mosque and an orphanage with Al-Jam'iyah al-Shar'iyah.
- All members of the Hitler family (62 members) were expelled from Matereya and had to sell their property within a maximum period of six months.
- The reconciliation did not mean that the Muslim family relinquished their right to legal procedures with the public prosecutor.
- A penalty of LE5 million would have to be paid in the event that either party breached the agreement.

In testimonies, members of the Hitler family stated that they did not attend the reconciliation session and that an elder of the Zaghoul family had been misled into attending and donating land to a charitable project, in addition to paying a sum of money under the impression that by doing so the two families would be able to return to Matareya and re-open their homes and stores. However, during the reconciliation session, the terms of agreement were changed as per the terms stated above. Moreover, the final terms were fraught with symbolism; while the council decided on the slaughtering of a sheep or a calf in addition to the shroud offer on behalf of the deceased and the amount of the blood money, the participants insisted that the Christians offer five shrouds and five calves to be slaughtered, implying that the blood of one Muslim is equal to that of five Christians.

## Ruling in Favor of Collective Punishment

Article 95 of the Egyptian Constitution stipulates that the punishment is to fall on the individual (personal); it is only permissible to punish the person convicted of an offense or a crime. International conventions on human rights, as well as the Egyptian Constitution, prohibit collective punishment. The Constitution also

stipulates that the penalty should be proportionate to the gravity of the offense and the circumstances of the offender. We find, however, that these stipulations have been violated several times as different forms of collective punishment were imposed for no other reasons than belonging to a certain family or adhering to a minority religion. Moreover, the punishment delivered was at times contrary to known customs and went against the nature of the offenses discussed in the session. Expulsion – amounting to forced displacement – for example, is considered one of the harshest punishments that affect entire families, some of whom are not implicated by the offense committed and might not even be sympathetic to the offender. These are citizens who are dealt a punishment merely for being acquainted with the offender. In the same context, rulings resulting from customary sessions regarding the restoration or construction of churches are delivered as collective punishment based on religious affiliation. Such a ruling befalls all Christians living in a specific neighborhood, thus going against the Constitution.

As for the proportionality of the punishment to the offense committed, we find that some sessions have included previously unrecognized terms. In the reconciliation session between the villages of Hawarteh and Beni-Ebeid, for example, the terms of agreement contained a clause stating that the “Copts of Beni-Ebeid (the Christians) were not to leave the village, even for work, for 15 days from the date of the reconciliation.”

## Same Crime, Different Punishments

It is known that when delivering rulings in criminal cases, there are different stages before the punishment is finalized. Every person convicted of a crime has the right to resort to a higher court to review their conviction or punishment. The right to appeal is a basic cornerstone of the right to a fair trial; it aims to guarantee that the convictions are free of errors, whether legal or procedural ones and that they present no violation of the suspect’s rights. This includes the rulings resulting from customary sessions. Such rights supplement other rights, including the right of the suspect to have access to the ruling and its dimensions.

In customary sessions, there is no chance for appeal. The ruling is enforced on the participants, especially if they sign financially heavy penalty clauses, to be paid if they breach the terms of agreement. Even in cases when there were no written binding conditions, the harmed party rarely resorts to court, out of fear that seeking legal procedures could lead to negative consequences for them or their families.

In many sessions where the person who instigated the aggression was Christian, the terms have explicitly stated that legal proceedings against them would continue in addition to the customary penalties levied. In one ses-



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sion, the family of a Christian student who posted a photo on his Facebook page considered to be in contempt of Islam, was subjected to collective punishment. The family's home, as well as the homes of other Copts in the village, were set on fire. A customary session resulted in the ruling to expel the student's family from Assuit. Additionally, legal procedures resulted in a three-year prison sentence.

## Ruling against Constitutional Rights

In addition to contravening the due process, as we detailed above, customary sessions have also led to rulings that are in violation of a number of rights enshrined in constitutional texts, as well as international human rights covenants. These include:

Article 63 of the Egyptian Constitution stipulates that, "All forms of arbitrary forced migration of citizens are forbidden. Such violations are a crime without a statute of limitations." The rulings resulting from customary sessions have not complied with this stipulation, and have often resorted to forced displacement as a temporary and unfair settlement of sectarian tensions. Further, the rulings have affected entire families for reasons that would not be enough if the tension had arisen between people of the same religion. This was evident in the case of a Christian man accompanying a Muslim woman on a walk in a public street in broad daylight. Citizens are routinely asked to leave their homes and properties and to leave their villages, sometimes even the entire district or governorate to find a new place to live and new sources of income. In some cases, an administrative committee is assigned to deal with the property of the displaced families by selling it. This often happens under the noses of government officials who sponsor such agreements. These rulings and actions are in flagrant violation of citizens rights and human rights. They are also an expression of the state's negligence to commit to its duty to protect citizens from forced evacuation, which are against the law according to article 11 (1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

It is sufficient to know that the customary council that was held to settle the sectarian attack in the village of Sharbat, (in Amereya district) in Alexandria took place at Amereya investigative unit in the presence of Colonel Khalid Shalabi, head of the criminal investigation department in Alexandria and the priest Boktor Nashed Abaskharon Soliman, as well as seven representatives of the Muslim families in the village. The Muslim side decided, with the blessing of the security leadership present, to expel eight Christian families from the village in order to calm the tension. Moreover, the representatives of the

Muslim side declared the sale of the properties of the expelled families within three months through the formation of a committee of Muslims headed by Sheikh Sharif al-Hawary that would be solely responsible for approving any sales. They also declared that the Christians were not to return to the village, even to accompany buyers interested in their properties. Finally, they declared that the committee would collect the value of the money owed to the stores owned by the expelled families – who used to offer delayed payments to their customers. When the Christian side objected to the terms of the agreement, especially regarding the expulsion of Abaskharon Khalil and his sons, and the sale of his property, they were told: “Whoever wants to return to the village is free to do so at their own risk of harm or assault.”

Freedom of belief, freedom to practice religious rituals and the freedom of opinion and expression are fundamental human rights that international covenants have protected against any violations and under all circumstances. They include freedom of faith, disclosure or non-disclosure of religion and creed and the freedom to practice the rites associated with the religion. These rights have been repeatedly violated during customary sessions, which give one entity the authority to determine whether and how citizens of different religions practice these rights. Most of the customary sessions that were held to deal with disputes over the construction or restoration of churches or prayer within churches have resulted in a violation of rights, despite the participation of representatives of official entities. Some churches were forced to halt their proposed construction or restoration and change their clergy, due to the objections of the Muslims in their communities that Christians from outside the village be allowed to worship in the church. The Muslims neither allowed Christians to build churches nor to worship in churches in other villages. They thus inflicted upon them the burden of having to travel to cities where they could worship.

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## Conclusion:

Social mechanisms are usually an acceptable, useful and much needed means of containing conflicts and dealing with sectarian tensions at the local and national level. However, such means should be employed side by side with the legal interventions to which citizens are entitled. It is the state's duty to protect such legal applications, guarantee their accessibility to citizens and ensure the protection of those who resort to them from any aggression against the rest of their rights.

Naturally, customary sessions have played a role in calming sectarian tensions in a number of cases; they put an end to the escalation of conflicts, especially in light of the ways in which religion is used to mobilize and incite supporters . However, customary sessions have also played a role in the renewal and repetition of sectarian attacks. Here, we present some reasons that have contributed to weakening the original role of customary sessions:

- Over time, these sessions have turned into a sort of judicial system that diverges from the formal justice system. Customary sessions have been used to evade the implementation of the law, giving those with a stronger tribal or clan presence more power to impose their own terms. Such terms, in some instances, have explicitly amounted to punishing citizens for exercising their constitutional and legal rights to resort to the law in the pursuit of justice. Unfortunately, some actors who possess an official capacity in the justice system have also participated in enforcing this injustice by not heeding the rule of law and by accepting customary rulings without considering the seriousness of the offenses committed. These offenses have included murder, arson and the looting of public and private property, as well as places of worship, in addition to owning firearms and other acts that are illegal according to the Egyptian penal code.
- These sessions have often lacked a fundamental principle upon which their effectiveness in containing sectarian conflicts rests: that the two parties to the conflict accept arbitration in the dispute. As we have demonstrated above, in many cases, security and executive governmental forces, as well as the stronger

party in the conflicts, have used their authority to coerce weaker parties to accept and attend these sessions according to the terms dictated by the stronger party. As a result, the state's institutions, which were supposed to protect the rights of citizens, have ended up being party to the dispute.

- Customary sessions have dealt with the manifestations and reasons for sectarian conflicts in a very superficial manner. Instead of looking for the roots of the problem at the local level and trying to deal with them, they have attempted to deal only with the effects of the attacks temporarily, without keeping in mind the need for a mechanism that prevents the re-occurrence of such situations. Only one session, mentioned earlier, referred to the necessity of holding cultural, social or political activities that would contribute in a spontaneous manner to the creation of common ground and the starting of a shared dialogue between citizens. This tendency to simplify the issue leads to the accumulation of problems over time and contributes to inflaming the situation even more, driving Copts to lose trust in state institutions.
- Some sessions resulted in unfair and unusual rulings. Such examples include the decision that Christian residents in Minya could not leave their homes, even for work or shopping, for 15 days. Another example includes the case where a council, formed by members of the opposite side in a dispute, was given the duty of selling the Christian's property after expelling them from the village of Sharbat in Alexandria. Other rulings have posed grave violation of rights that are enshrined in international covenants of human rights and the Egyptian Constitution, including freedom of religion and belief, the right to practice religious rituals, freedom of expression and opinion, ownership of property and due process guarantees. This took place with the attendance of state officials and thus presented a codification of societal discrimination based on the religious sect of the citizens.
- The organization and leadership of these sessions has become the domain of specific groups that are either close to local state institutions, the former governing party, or are those with financial or tribal influence in the area. For example, the members of the dissolved National Democratic Party were the ones who took control of these sessions before the revolution of January 25. After the revolution, members of the Muslim Brotherhood became the ones in charge. The situation once again changed after the ouster of Mohamed Morsi, where the elders and former members of parliament began to take control. Overall, the desire to employ these sessions in a political manner to garner popularity has dominated, whether among state officials or residents.

# Annex:

## Summary of Incidents of Sectarian Tensions and Attacks where Customary Reconciliation Sessions were Employed.

Summary of Incidents of Sectarian Tensions and Attacks where Customary Reconciliation Sessions were Convened

No.	Date/Incident	What happened?	Consequences
1	March 4, 2011 Church in the village of Sol (Atfeeh District) set on fire	A crowd of Muslims from the village of Atfeeh torched and destroyed the church of St. George and St. Mina against the backdrop of a romantic relationship between a Christian man and a Muslim woman.	<p>A number of customary sessions were held since tensions first appeared on February 24, 2011.</p> <p>The first session, dated March 3, was held before the burning of the church. The session resulted in the decision to expel Magdy Aziz and Ashraf Labib, who were allegedly in a romantic relationship with two Muslim women – stipulating that they do not return again to the village, whether to visit or reside, in addition to their having to sell their houses. The two Christian families did, in fact, move their furniture out of the village and two “for sale” signs were hung on the doors of the houses.</p> <p>The second session, dated March 5, was held after the church was set on fire and parts of it were destroyed, in the presence of Qadry Abu Hussein, the governor of Helwan at the time, and a committee he called “The committee of the wise men of Sol.” It contained no Christian representation. The resulting agreement was to not build a new church after the current church was destroyed.</p> <p>The third session was held in the village under the auspices of military forces and Salafi leadership on March 12. It resulted in a statement that opened with a review of how the terms reflect the “Islamic opinion” and the opinions of Muslim scholars. The 7th article of the statement read: “According to the general governing rules of God Almighty and the advisory opinions of the Muslim scholars mentioned below, the SCAF decided upon the building of the church of Sol in the same place and surface area at the expense of the Armed Forces and under the supervision of the Engineering Authority of the Armed Forces, starting tomorrow, Sunday March 13, 2011.”</p>

2	<p>March 20, 2011. Cutting a Christian man's ear in the governorate of Qena</p>	<p>In Qena, Ayman Nour Metri had one of his ears cut, was subjected to deep wounds in his neck and had his apartment and car set on fire by perpetrators who cited the application of God's law (shar' Allah). The events go back to the objection of some Salafi members to Ayman leasing an apartment to two women whom the assailants described as "having a bad reputation."</p>	<p>A customary reconciliation session was held on March 24 in the presence of a number of sheikhs and priests in Qena, among whom was the head of the Association of the Supporters of the Muhammadi Sunna (Ansar al-Sunna) and the military ruler of Qena. When a reconciliation report was submitted to the public prosecutor, the public prosecutor accepted its terms and released the defendants. In a unusual twist of events, the public prosecutor later decided not to accept the reconciliation report and referred the case to the criminal court in Qena. The court accepted the customary reconciliation and acquitted the defendants.</p>
3	<p>March 23, 2011. Preventing the expansion of a church in the village of Beni-Ahmed in Minya</p>	<p>In Minya, dozens of Muslims gathered in front of St. George church in the village of Beni-Ahmed in objection to the expansion of the church in the eastern direction on land owned by the church. They demanded that any work carried out to date be destroyed and that the priest Georgy Thabet leave the village.</p>	<p>A customary session was held between Muslims and Christians in the village in the presence of the military governor, who demanded that they find a friendly solution to the problem. It was decided that the Christians should halt the expansion activities that were underway and that a fence separating the church and the empty land owned by the church be built.</p>
4	<p>March 23, 2011. Setting the shop of a Christian man on fire and expelling him from his residence in Beheira</p>	<p>Nabil Naguib Abdel Malak was assaulted and his tailoring shop – owned by his father in the village of Abu al-Matameer in the governorate of Beheira was burned. Nabil had paid the bus fare for a Muslim woman he knew and some used this as an indication of a sexual relationship between the two.</p>	<p>Two reconciliation sessions were held to contain the crisis in the presence of trusted Muslim elders as well as security and community leaders. One session was held in Abu al-Matameer police station and the other in the building of the local council. The participants in the two sessions affirmed that what had taken place was based on a rumor about a relationship between the young man and the young girl. It was decided that the man would leave his home and would live somewhere else in the same city.</p>

5	<p>April 4, 2011. Preventing prayer in the St. Jonas church in the village of Qamadeer in Minya</p>	<p>Dozens of Muslims in the village of Qamadeer (Samalot district) prevented the Christians of the village from entering the church by crowding its entrance. The church was closed and worship was halted against the backdrop of the Copts' application for a permit to demolish the mud-brick church and to rebuild it. A number of Christians from the village held a sit-in in front of the governorate building, while dozens of Muslims marched in the streets and threw stones and bricks at the Christians' homes.</p>	<p>A reconciliation session was held in one of the halls in a Coptic orphans' shelter in Samalot, in the presence of Christian and Muslim representatives, Members of Parliament, archbishops, some sheikhs and security leaders. The two sides signed a reconciliation report at the end of the session that was ratified by the military ruler and the security director.</p> <p>The reconciliation stipulated that the church be moved to a new location 200 meters away from the old one, such that the old church would be given to the Christians for worship until the new building was ready in three months. Additionally, the reconciliation terms stipulated that the new church should be built on an area of 240 meters square, should consist of only one floor and have no externally visible physical manifestations of a church.</p>
6	<p>April 28, 2011. Tensions arose when a Christian man was accused of assaulting a Muslim girl in Zawya al-Hamra neighborhood in Cairo</p>	<p>Hundreds of Muslims congregated in front of Al-Nazeer Mosque in Zawya al-Hamra neighborhood in Cairo, calling for revenge against Fathi Metri and his family after the family of a three-year-old child, Salma Ayman Abdel Moneim, accused him of sexually assaulting her when her mother visited Dr. Essam Galal's clinic in a building owned by a Christian citizen.</p>	<p>A reconciliation session was held in Al-Nazeer mosque in the presence of the mosque's sheikhs, a priest, a Coptic lawyer, representatives of the child's family and others. They discussed letting "Ayman Fathi face prosecution according to the law of criminal procedures, whatever the verdict might be, including the death penalty." The agreement also included a stipulation that the suspect sell the property where the crime was committed at market rate to any willing buyer. The suspect was fined LE25,000, to be paid to the child's family in compensation for the harm he inflicted on her reputation.</p>

7	<p>May 19, 2011. Preventing the opening of a church in Ain Shams in Cairo</p>	<p>A number of Christian youth, along with two priests in charge of the church of the Virgin Mary and Anba Abraham in the village of Ezbet Atef in Ain Shams al-Gharbeya moved to the location of the church at the crossroads between Tawfikeya Street and Masna' al-Shark Street, to prepare the area for the practice of religious rituals upon the announcement by a government official that several old churches would be reopened.</p> <p>Dozens of Muslims gathered in front of Al-Nour mosque, across from the church, to prevent its opening and to announce their rejection of the existence of the church in the area.</p>	<p>A customary session was held in the Kardasa family's reception hall, in the presence of family elders from Ain Shams al-Gharbeya and representatives of Al-Azhar and the Ministry of Religious Endowments, as well as a number of leaders of the police and military and priests. At the end of the session, a report was issued stating that the residents of the region approve the use of the building as a church, provided the necessary permits are obtained by official entities, on the condition that it would have no church bells or crosses or any other physical external religious manifestations. The church did not obtain the permit, despite the participation of security officials in the session. The church has not been opened to date.</p>
8	<p>June 25, 2011. Assaults and setting buildings on fire against the backdrop of building a church illegally in the village of Awlad Khalaf in Sohag</p>	<p>The village of Awlad Khalaf (in Salam district) in Sohag witnessed sectarian attacks between Muslims and Christians that led to the injury of Muslims by gunshots and the wounding of a Christian man in the head. The attacks also led to arson, looting and the damaging of several Coptic homes, against the backdrop of a rumor that a Copt had built a church in the village.</p>	<p>Residents of the village from both sides held a customary reconciliation session on July 2, in the presence of leaders from the governorate as well as security officials. The two sides agreed to peace and reconciliation. Additionally, the participating Muslims pledged to contribute to the restoration of the damaged houses and to return the stolen items to their rightful owners (most of which were returned, including gold jewelry). The two sides relinquished their legal rights before the public prosecutor in order to ensure the release of suspects on both sides.</p>



9	<p>June 30, 2011. Clashes in Qalosna in Minya, against the backdrop of the sexual harassment of a woman</p>	<p>Sectarian clashes took place between Muslims and Christians north of Samalot district, north of Minya, against the backdrop of Muslims sexually harassing a Christian girl. Firearms were used, as well as knives and bats, leading to the injury of five citizens on both sides and the arson and damage of a number of workshops, houses and cars.</p>	<p>The residents of the village held a customary reconciliation session at the home of consultant Mohsen al-Bakry, in the presence of the mayor of the village, the head of the local council, the head of the city and a number of executive representatives and security leaders. The resulting terms of agreement stipulated the removal of the reasons for the dispute, covering the cost of repairs for the damage caused and a penalty clause of LE500,000, to be paid by the side breaching the terms of the agreement. Additionally, the residents decided to hold another session to include family elders, Muslim and Christian clergy, security representatives as well as the suspects who had been released and the injured, in order to settle all disputes. This took place after the injured had left the hospital.</p>
10	<p>July 29, 2011. The siege of a church in Ezbet Yaacoub in Minya over preventing the installation of a church bell</p>	<p>Dozens of Muslims from the village of Ezbet Yaacoub (Samalot district) in Minya attempted to break into the church of St. George with weapons, gas cylinders and Molotov cocktails. They were objecting to the installation of a church bell after the renovation of the church. The church had obtained official permits to demolish the old church and rebuild it.</p>	<p>A customary reconciliation session was held in the city council in Samalot on the evening of Sunday July 31, in order to put an end to sectarian strife. A number of leaders from the security forces and the military forces attended the session. The two sides pledged to commit to all the terms, which included signing a penalty clause of LE100,000, to be paid if either party breaches the terms of the reconciliation. It was also indicated that the participants had moved from the location of the session, entered the village together and visited one another in a symbolic gesture of putting an end to the strife.</p>

11	<p>August 7 &amp; 8, 2011.</p> <p>Assaults on the Christians of Nazlet Faragallah in Minya by a number of Muslims from the village and neighboring villages</p>	<p>Sectarian attacks erupted on a wide scale, leading to the killing of a Christian citizen and the injury of four Muslims, as well as the arson of six houses owned by Christians. This was in addition to a number of thefts and a prevailing atmosphere of fear among citizens. The events arose out of a regular verbal clash between a Muslim and a Christian, when the former was speeding on his motorcycle in the narrow alleys of the village. The clash escalated into a sectarian fight when citizens of each religion supported one of the two sides. Muslims from neighboring villages arrived and tried to break into the village church.</p>	<p>A customary reconciliation session was held on Tuesday evening, first in Hawarteh village and then later in the village of Nazlet Faragallah. The security director, Major General Mamdouh Maqlad, and a military representative, as well as more than a 1000 citizens from the two villages attended the session.</p> <p>The resulting agreement dictated the protection of lives and properties and reconciliation between the two sides. A penalty clause was placed, binding whichever side was found to be in breach of the terms of the agreement with a half a million pound payment. Ten members from each side signed receipts to this effect that were kept by members of the reconciliation committee. Each side relinquished compensation for damages done.</p>
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12	<p>September 2, 2011, and for some time after that date. Burning the church of Marinab, north of Aswan</p>	<p>A number of Muslims from the village of Marinab (Edfu district) in the north of Aswan carried out assaults against the backdrop of the Christians rebuilding a church in accordance with official permits from the governor. In the beginning, the dispute was over the shape of the building. It later escalated into the desire to halt the entire construction. In this context, three customary sessions were arranged. Reconciliation was later reached and the Copts started to demolish the domes of the churches. However, Friday prayers on September 20 were accompanied with a sermon from one of the sheikhs in the village, who called for Muslims to gather and incited them to totally destroy the church. Hundreds set fire to the church, as well as some adjacent buildings. They destroyed the domes, the roof and parts of the walls. Then they started to break parts of four cement columns using saws and shovels.</p>	<p>A number of customary sessions were held:  The first session: It was held on September 2, at the church of the Virgin Mary in Edfu, north of Aswan. Major General Adel Hassan, head of the investigative unit in the north of Aswan, representatives of families from the village and Christian clergy participated in the session. The representatives of the Muslim families submitted a list, which included four demands: no crosses to be placed on the top of the church, not to hang church bells, not to install microphones and to demolish the six domes on top of the church.  The church representatives accepted the first three demands and refused the fourth, regarding the demolishing of the domes.  The second session: It was held on September 9 at the village chambers in the presence of Muslims and Christians. The session failed to put an end to the crisis.  The third session: It was held at the Edfu police station in the presence of the security director in Aswan as well as some officials, with the aim of reaching reconciliation. The attendees delegated a Christian contractor to start the process of demolishing the violating structures in the presence of security forces. The process of demolishment started with the removal of two domes on the eastern side.  Later, the building was rebuilt in the same shape in which it existed earlier, except without the domes and with no external religious manifestations, according to the decision issued by Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, the head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), who was governing Egypt at the time. The church has not been opened for worship to date.</p>
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13	<p>October 8, 2011. The expulsion of an entire family from Al Menia over a “like” of a Facebook post</p>	<p>Hundreds of Muslims from the villages of Ezbet Shakir and Abu Aziz (Matay district) in Minya, threw rocks at the house of a Christian man named Nour Eyad Salib (32 years old). They demanded his expulsion from the village, along with his family, after it became known in the village he had posted photos in contempt of the prophet on Facebook.</p>	<p>A reconciliation session was held in the city’s local council. The representatives of the Muslim side insisted that the Christian young man’s family (consisting of his wife, mother, father and sister-in-law) be permanently expelled from the village. A penalty clause was placed, amounting to a million pounds, to be paid if the Christian man returned to the village. The man’s family accepted the stipulations. After a second customary session in 2014, the family returned to the village with the exception of the young man.</p>
14	<p>October 26, 2011. Sectarian clashes against the backdrop of a rumor of Muslims being prevented from praying in a mosque</p>	<p>Sectarian clashes took place between the Muslims of the village of Rayermoon and the Christians of the village of Bayadeya (Malawi district) after a rumor that the residents of the predominantly Christian Bayadeya village were preventing the few Muslim families living there from praying in the mosque. The clashes led to the injury of Mamdouh Atteya Qaldas, Ibrahim Karam, Yousri Shafik, the wife of Gerges Hanna and Mabrouk Fawzy from the village of Bayadeya. Farouk Sayed Mohamed and Hassan Amr Amin from the village of Rayermoon were also injured. Additionally, two cars belonging to Eid Hanna Khalil and Gerges Maazouz were smashed.</p>	<p>A customary reconciliation session took place on October 27, 2011, in the presence of Major General Mamdouh Maqlad, assistant to the minister of Interior in Minya, and a number of Muslim and Christian clergy at the hall of the Muslim Youth Association in Malawi. An official report of customary reconciliation was drawn. Twenty-eight representatives of the two sides of the conflict (14 Muslims and 14 Christians) swore on the Quran and the Bible to do no harm and to offer love and friendliness towards one another. A penalty clause of LE500,000 was placed, to be paid by any party breaching the terms of the reconciliation. The terms also stipulated that the two sides engage in activities together, such as a football tournament and other cultural activities. The signatories and the guest headed to the house of the mayor of Bayadeya village and later to the home of the village sheikh in Rayermoon. A second conference on reconciliation was organized on November 4, 2011, in the presence of Major General Serag al-Din al-Roubi, the governor of Minya and Major General Mamdouh Maqlad, security director in Minya, as well as other security and religious leaders and the residents of the two villages.</p>

15	December 7, 2011. Attacking a monastery in Assuit	Dozens of Muslims from Ezbet Dos (Dayrout district) in Assuit stormed land owned by the monastery of Al-Shaheed Tawadros al-Mashriqy, after monastery officials built a fence around the land. They started to cut down trees in preparation for building a school and placed a sign that read, "Mother of believers" school or "Om al-Moemeneen."	A reconciliation session was held between the two sides and it was agreed to allocate 3000 square meters as a donation from the monastery: half to be used to build a school in the center of the village and half to establish a youth center.
16	September 29 & 30, 2011. Violence in four villages in Assuit against the backdrop of a "Facebook post," which was said to be in contempt of Islam	Incidents of sectarian violence and tension took place in four villages in Assuit: Manqabad, Adr, Baheeg and Salam. According to testimonies by a number of witnesses, the colleagues of the student Gamal Abdo Mas-soud in Manqabad high school objected to a photo posted on his personal Facebook page – claiming that it was in contempt of the prophet. A number of private properties and houses in the four villages were attacked, looted and set on fire.	The governor of Assuit, Major General al-Sayed Boraie and the security director, Major General Mohamed Ibrahim, held a meeting in the presence of a number of Members of Parliament affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafis and other Islamic groups, a representative of the Ministry of Religious Endowments, a number of Muslim and Christian clergy and representatives of the families from the villages that witnessed the clashes. The participants agreed on the prosecution of the student who caused the problem on charges of defamation of religion (urgent trial). They also agreed to permanently expel the student and his family from the village. Additionally, they agreed to file a report of the damages incurred to houses belonging to Christians in the villages of Salam and Adr, as a result of fires, and to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators. Moreover, it was agreed that the pastors would offer an official apology in all media sources, and that the friend who incited him to share the post, Mina Gamil Beshay, be arrested and that he, along with his family, be permanently expelled.

17	January 19, 2012. Attacks in the village of Rahmaneya in Qena	Muslims from the village of Rahmaneya (Nag' Hammadi district) in Qena fired shots in the air in the direction of Coptic houses in an attempt to take over a piece of land behind Rahmaneya central telephone station. The land belonged to the Naga-reen family. The takeover attempt led to sectarian clashes and a number of houses and vehicles were set on fire. The village had witnessed tensions between Muslims and Christians during the Parliamentary elections, which took place on January 3 & 4, when a number of Christians were attacked and prevented from voting. A complaint of the incident was filed at the police station.	The council "House of the Family" (Bait al-'Aila) in Nag' Hammadi held a session to calm the tensions between Muslims and Christians on March 9, 2012. The session was held in the presence of Anba Kirolos, the Bishop of Nag' Hammadi, Sheikh Ahmed Abdel Latif, director of the Religious Endowments Directorate in Nag' Hammadi, Muslim and Christian religious leaders and other community leaders. The participants agreed that Shenouda Finhas, who was accused of defacing a copy of the Quran, should be banned from working in the barbershop he owned. Instead, his brother Mina (or anyone else he nominated should manage the shop. This took place after the Muslim witness had retracted his testimony about seeing the Christian man defacing the Quran. After signing the reconciliation report, Sheikh Gaber pledged to protect anyone working in the shop when it re-opens. However, when Mina Finhas tried to re-open the shop, a number of Muslims gathered and prevented him from doing so.
18	January 27, 2012. Burning houses & forced displacement in Sharbat village in Alexandria against the backdrop of an emotional relationship between a Christian man and a Muslim woman	Muslims from the village of Sharbat in the Nahda area (Amareya district) in Alexandria attacked a number of houses and properties belonging to Copts from the village, against the backdrop of an alleged exchange among Muslims of photos and a video segment showing a sexual encounter between Mourad Samy Gerges and a Muslim woman.	A number of customary sessions were held. The terms of agreement stipulated the forced displacement of eight families, among whom were people related to the individual implicated in the sexual relationship, and another five that were not directly involved in the conflict. One member of the five families reacted to his house being set on fire by firing shots in the air without injuring anyone. After a discussion of the case in Parliament, a committee of Members of Parliament visited the village and met with the residents. This last customary session dictated the return of five Christian families without compensation.

19	<p>February 24, 2012. Forced displacement of a Christian pharmacist from his village of Saft Abu Garg in Minya, after he was accused of defaming Islam</p>	<p>A number of Muslim residents from the village of Saft Abu Garg gathered in front of a pharmacy owned by a Christian man from the village, after a rumor spread that he posted a photo in contempt of Islam on his Facebook page. The Christian man posted a photo with the caption, "Solving the problems of poverty and the problems of Egypt" and compared two opinions by Sheikh al-Howeini and Dr. Mohamed al-Baradei.</p>	<p>The head of the investigative unit in Beni-Mazar and the National Security official coerced Dr. Moemen Magdy into signing a report of customary reconciliation. The report stated that a customary reconciliation session was held between the first party (Christian) and the second party (Muslim), upon which the following was decided: Shutting the pharmacy down. Forcing Moemen Magdy out of the village. Not to harm his family. Two Salafi sheikhs and a Muslim Brotherhood leader signed the report. The next day, the pharmacist's father received a notification, demanding he remove the pharmacy's sign and sell all the medicine in the pharmacy. Later, Moemen Magdy's family was subjected to harassment at their place of work, because of what had been circulating about Moemen's contempt for Islam. He was forced to sell the pharmacy at a low price and remains, until the time of the report, expelled from the village.</p>
20	<p>April 20, 2012. Attacks based on a rumor about a relationship between a Christian man and a Muslim woman in Amareya</p>	<p>The property of Copts in the village of Basareya (Amareya district), in Alexandria, was subjected to looting and burning against the backdrop of a Christian man walking with a young Muslim woman in one of the district's streets. The church of Anba Wanas in the village was also attacked, along with an attached service building. On June 22, 2012, the dispute was renewed once more against the backdrop of visits to the church by people from outside the village. Muslims surrounded the church and demanded the departure of the visiting Christians before they had finished praying.</p>	<p>Two customary reconciliation sessions were held between the residents of the village, under the auspices of the security forces and executive leadership in Alexandria. The first session took place on May 3, 2012, at Al-Huda Mosque, under the guardianship of Sheikh Sharif al-Hawary. Five Muslims and five Christians attended the session. The participants agreed on the departure of the Christian young man and the Muslim young woman from the village, while their families were allowed to stay. On the next day, a reconciliation session was held in the village. The Christian man's family returned later, but the man himself remained expelled.  With the renewal of the attacks against the backdrop of the visits to the village's church, a third session was held and it was agreed to ban visits to the church.</p>

21	<p>June 9, 2012.</p> <p>Clashes between Muslim and Christian women against the backdrop of a religious debate in the dorms of the University of Assuit</p>	<p>Clashes erupted between a number of female students in the dorms of Assuit university against the backdrop of a religious debate.</p> <p>The clashes resulted in the injury of around a dozen student and supervisors, who were trying to end the clashes. Moreover, dozens of Salafis gathered in front of the dorms demanding the expulsion and punishment of a Christian female student, whom they accused of causing the problem.</p>	<p>The President of the University, Major General Mohamed Ibrahim, the security director, Sheikh Bayoumi Ismail, a Muslim Brotherhood member of Parliament and Shaaban Ibrahim, the Jama'at al-Islamiya representative in Assuit met together. The leaders held two separate meetings with the Christian and Muslim students. They agreed to clear the air and start an investigation over the incident, with the knowledge of the university's administration.</p> <p>The University of Assuit decided on the expulsion of the Christian student from the dorms as punishment. Four female students and a female building supervisor were referred to administrative investigation to verify the reasons for the clashes, although it was agreed that official legal action wouldn't be pursued.</p>
22	<p>July 13, 2012. Murder, forced displacement and looting of property in the village of Dahshour in Giza, against the backdrop of the murder of a Muslim man</p>	<p>The village of Dahshour in the south of Giza witnessed sectarian attacks and forced displacement of Christians, with the presence of security forces, against the backdrop of a fight between a Muslim and Christian man, which resulted in the death of the former.</p> <p>After the incident, the village saw revenge attacks that included looting, forced displacement of the Christians of the village, the destruction of the main gate of the St. George church in the village, throwing rocks at its windows and breaking into a room inside the church's fence. A number of Muslims from the village used tear gas to disperse the groups trying to attack the church.</p>	<p>A number of official and popular delegations visited the village to persuade them to allow the expelled Christians to return. They were later allowed to return, except for the family of the Christian man accused of the Muslim's murder. The family of the murdered Muslim later carried out a revenge attack (tha'r) by killing a man from the Christian man's family. A customary session was held between the Muslims and Christians of the village that was attended by security and community leaders, who decided on reconciling the two families and relinquishing the mutual official report. The two suspects, the Muslim and the Christian, were both released.</p>



23	September 30, 2012. Two Christian children from al-Fashn district are accused of defacing a Quran copy	A Muslim man from the village of Ezbet Marco (in Fashn district) in Beni-Suef, accused two children of defacing a copy of the Quran. The police arrested the children in the early hours and detained them at Fashn police station for two days. On the third day, they were referred to the Fashn prosecution. During this time, there were several attempts of incitement against the Christians of the village for revenge.	Christian and Muslim family elders held a customary reconciliation session under the auspices of security. The decision not to escalate matters was reaffirmed. The issue of the legal case against the children was not discussed. The residents of the village demanded that the priest not return to his work in the village, which was accepted by the Christians of the village. The Fashn prosecution decided to place the two children in a care facility in the city of Beni-Suef for a week, until the investigation was completed.
24	October 20, 2012. Tension against the back-drop of the building of an illegal wall at a church in Zagazig	Dozens of Muslims, from the village of Kafr Atallah in Zagazig district in Sharkiya governorate surrounded the Virgin Mary church in the village, objecting to the church demolishing an old wall and building a new one, despite the fact that the local unit had issued an order for its demolition. This led to a number of young men, who were present during the demonstration, being detained inside the church.	A customary session was organized with representatives from the church and Muslims from the village present. The church pastor Bakhom Abdel Malak pledged to demolish the old wall in execution of the order from the local unit. The tensions were renewed on November 9, 2013, when dozens of Muslim youth gathered in front of the church in the afternoon in protest of the continued existence of the wall, despite the pastor's pledge to have it removed during the customary session. Abdel Malak then removed the old wall, such that the new wall would be built parallel to the new cement columns, in order to appease the residents.

25	<p>October 28, 2012.</p> <p>An assault on Christian worshippers in the village of Marco Tala (Fashn district). The Christians had arrived from outside the village and the residents objected to their praying in the village church</p>	<p>On the morning of Sunday October 28, 2012, Christian worshippers were attacked as they exited the St. George church in Ezbet Marco Tala village. The assailants used sticks, bats and rocks, and a number of them also carried metal chains and knives. Residents in the village objected to the Christians of neighboring villages (where no churches exist) worshipping in Ezbet Marco Tala's St. George church.</p>	<p>The elders of the families of Ezbet Marco Tala and other neighboring villages held a customary reconciliation session in the evening of the same day under the auspices of Brigadier-General Mohamed Rustom, head of Fashn police station. Major General Mostafa Abu Aqrab, head of the investigative unit at the police station also attended the session. It was agreed that no Christians should be permitted to come from the nearby villages to pray in the church, as the residents of Ezbet Marco perceive it to be the location of Christian religious rituals. The terms for the customary reconciliation obliged the assailants to repair two cars that were attacked, and the Christians to withdraw the complaints they filed over the attacks. The terms included a penalty clause amounting to LE500,000, to be paid by the party which reignites tension.</p>
26	<p>January 17, 2013.</p> <p>Breaking into the church of the village of Marashda in Qena. The properties of several Copts were targeted, after a Copt was accused of assaulting a Muslim girl.</p>	<p>Dozens of Muslims stormed into Abu Fam al-Guindy church in the village of Marashda, in Waqf district, in the north of Qena. They also attacked houses and stores owned by Copts under the pretext of a Copt being accused of sexual harassment and taking the virginity of a Muslim female child. The attacks took place over two days in the presence of security forces.</p>	<p>A customary reconciliation session was held that stipulated the expulsion of the Christian trader from the village. The man was accused of sexually assaulting a Muslim female child in the village. The terms of the agreement also stipulated that the expulsion was in addition to the legal procedures to be taken against him, regardless of the outcome.</p>

27	<p>February 15, 2013.</p> <p>Attacks on a church in the village of Sarasna in Fayoum, against the backdrop of building on vacant land owned by the church</p>	<p>A fight took place between the priest Domadios Habib, the pastor of St. George church in the village of Sarasna (Tamia district), and Muslim neighbors against the backdrop of the church starting to build cement columns in a vacant space adjacent to it and owned by the church. The land separates the church from the land owned by neighbor Hussein Kamel. Around fifty Muslims gathered on the roof of Hussein Kamel's house and threw rocks and Molotov bottles at the church, setting the wooden dome on top of the church on fire, as well as a number of wooden chairs, and breaking the windows.</p>	<p>Under the auspices of the head of Tamia district, a customary session was held at the home of Abdel Fattah Abdel Hamid, one of the village's Muslim residents, in the presence of the Muslim neighbors of the church and four Muslim witnesses, in addition to seven Copts. The attacks on the church were renewed during the session from the top of the neighbor's house. The assailants threw burning pieces of cloth and chanted demands about the closure of the church. The participants in the customary reconciliation session were forced to move the session to Tamia headquarters. The terms of the resulting agreement were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building a separating fence, 30 cm wide, between the church and neighboring land.</li> <li>Not to build any buildings on the vacant land owned by the church, which is to be used only as storage space.</li> <li>The vacant land is not to be included with the building, where religious rituals are held.</li> <li>The church's building is to remain in its current state without increasing its height. Its height is to be not more than 3 meters.</li> <li>The church officials are to apply sound insulating material on the top of the roof of the church and a layer of tiles on top of the roof of the Muslim neighbor. The expenses are to be covered by the church.</li> </ul>
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28	<p>February 28, 2013, and for a few days later. Attempts to break into a Kom Ombo church and attacks on Copts against the backdrop of circulating rumor about a Muslim woman converting to Christianity</p>	<p>The city of Kom Ombo, north of Aswan, witnessed several attack attempts on St. George's church, against the backdrop of the disappearance of Sahar al-Touny and a rumor that circulated of her conversion to Christianity – and the role the church played in her conversion. Groups of Muslim residents, from the city and other neighboring villages, attacked the church with rocks and stones. They smashed a number of cars and burned windows in the church services building by throwing Molotov cocktails. They also caused injuries to some Copts who were guarding the church during the clashes.</p>	<p>Dr. Ahmed al-Tayeb, Sheikh of Al-Azhar, sent a delegation from the House of the Egyptian Family (Bait al-'Aila al-Masreya) headed by his consultant for dialogue affairs, Dr. Mohamed Azab, in order to contain the crisis of the disappearance of a Muslim young woman in Kom Ombo. It was believed that the young woman disappeared in the church of St. George. The delegation met with the officials over several sessions. The discussions revealed that the young woman is somewhere in Egypt and that the rumors about her presence in the church were unfounded.</p> <p>The security leadership handed over the disappeared teacher to her family with an official report on the evening of March 3 in Sharm al-Sheikh. The Sharm al-Sheikh prosecutor approved the report.</p> <p>The director of Religious Endowments in Kom Ombo and some of the sheikhs in the city offered an apology on behalf of the Muslims of the village who attacked the church and attempted to burn it after the rumor circulated.</p>
29	<p>February 28, 2012 Taking over a building owned by the Archbishops of Bibba under the pretext of turning it into a church</p>	<p>A number of Copts in the city of Bibba, in the south of Beni Suef, organized a demonstration in front of the security directorate to denounce the repeated infringement on the property of the archbishops, which are only returned after paying a financial sum. The last incident was breaking into the archbishop's home in Bibba in the region of Fawreqa under the pretext that it was being converted into a church. The house is 1500 square meters and is located on the agricultural Cairo-As-suit road</p>	<p>A customary session was held on February 9, which stipulated that the house is rightfully owned by the archbishops. The terms also stated that a sum of LE300,000 should be paid to the archbishop as compensation. The archbishops relinquished the compensation. When the Muslim side rejected the terms, a new session was held on February 13 and it was decided that the house is rightfully owned by the archbishops of Bibba, such that they should pay LE200,000 to the assailants.</p>

30	<p>April 16, 2013.</p> <p>Preventing the building of a fence around the church of Al-Zara in Gerga district.</p>	<p>Citizens, from the village of Al-Zara (Gerga district) in Sohag, prevented the St. Mina church from building a surrounding fence, despite attaining the necessary official permits. They threatened the church's pastors with attacks against them and demolishing the church if they built the fence.</p>	<p>A customary session was held, where it was agreed not to change anything about the current situation and not to build the fence.</p>
31	<p>April 26, 2013.</p> <p>Tensions in the city of Wasti, against the backdrop of accusations that a Christian man influenced the conversion of a Muslim woman to Christianity and aided her escape from her family</p>	<p>Sectarian tensions and clashes controlled the scene among Muslims and Christians in Wasti city, north of Beni Suef since February 21, 2012. The tensions started when the family of the young woman, Rana Hatem al-Shazli, a student at the Liberal Arts college in the university of Beni Suef, issued a report accusing a Christian family of kidnapping the young woman and hiding her after her conversion to Christianity.</p> <p>After Friday prayers, hundreds of Muslims organized a rally and tried to march to the church. When they found the roads blocked, they threw rocks and Molotov cocktails at the church.</p>	<p>An expansive session was organized in the office of the security director in Beni Suef, in the presence of the assistant of the Minister of Interior for the region of northern Upper Egypt and representatives of religious and political groups, as well as representatives of the archbishops. The participants agreed to calm tensions and for the church to assist in the search for the missing woman. It was affirmed that the church was not involved in the incident of the disappearance of the woman.</p> <p>On Tuesday April 23, 2013, a meeting was organized with the Ministry of Interior and attended by the assistant to the minister of general security, Major General Abdeen Youssef, the woman's father, the Wasti church pastor and Members of Parliament (on behalf of the Freedom and Justice party, the Nour party, the Wafd party and the Watan party). The meeting was to push the ministry of interior to look for the woman and return her to her family.</p>

32	<p>April 30, 2013. Forced expulsion of two Christians and fining others over a Facebook post considered to be in contempt of Islam</p>	<p>A number of Muslims from the village of Abu Sidhom (Samalot district) gathered in front of the houses of some Christians from the village. They threw rocks at the houses in protest over a Christian man, Atteya Gerges Atteya, a farmer from the village, who works in Jordan, posting on his personal Facebook page a photo they considered to be in contempt of the Kaa'ba (the cuboid building at the center of Islam's most sacred mosque).</p>	<p>A customary session was organized and it was agreed to permanently expel the young man, Atteya Gerges Atteya, from the village. The session also resulted in the expulsion of the young man Mansour Shindy, a construction worker in the village, who "liked" the Facebook post. Mansour Shindy was required to pay a penalty of half a million pounds if he wishes to live in the village. The same session resulted in fining Abu al-Kheir Ibrahim Nashed and Kamal Bolis Mikhail, who fought with some Muslim citizens over the incident, fifty thousand pounds, citing that they had offended Islam.</p>
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33	<p>April 30, 2013.</p> <p>A tripartite agreement between the monastery of Saint Macarius the Alexandrian in Fayoum, the Environmental Affairs Agency and local residents</p>	<p>The Environmental Affairs Agency, the monastery of Saint Macarius the Alexandrian, known as the Carved Monastery (Addeir al-Manhout) and the local residents in the natural reserve surrounding Wady al-Rayyan (Youssef al-Siddiq district) in Fayoum made an agreement to end a conflict between the monastery, the ministry and the region's residents. The conflict arose when the monastery built an eight kilometer fence surrounding the ground water springs, which are subject to the law governing natural reserves.</p>	<p>The terms of agreement were:</p> <p>The Natural reserve and its administration are governed by the state, which is represented by the Environment Ministry and the Environmental Affairs Agency. They are in charge of all matters related to the administration and they are delegated to enforce the law that governs natural reserves.</p> <p>The local residents in the region have a right to practice environmental touristic activities in the region in the natural ground springs area. They also have the right to hold economic activities in the permissible regions in the reserve outside the natural ground springs area.</p> <p>The monastery has the right to practice religious rituals and live in accordance with the standards and conditions of the Nature Protection sector in the Environmental Affairs Agency</p> <p>The administration for the reserve is to create a number of entry points and gates in the fence surrounding the ground water springs area without demolishing the eight kilometer fence (parallel to the main road and the Manqueer mountain), such that the use of the region is possible to everyone under the administration of the employees of Al-Rayyan natural reserve and such that the gates opposite to the ground water springs are allocated for environmental tourism visits – which are organized by local residents.</p> <p>Allocating a sum from the entrance fees to the reserve for the development of environmental tourism services practiced by local residents.</p> <p>The immediate halting of any construction or agricultural activities, or their expansion, carried out by the monastery. In case there is a need for new agricultural activities, this should take place in the areas outside the ground springs area.</p>
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34	<p>May 14, 2013</p> <p>Storming a church and attacking commercial shops against the backdrop of a Muslim sexually harassing a Coptic young woman</p>	<p>Muslims from the village of Menbal attacked the Christians of the neighboring village of Menshaat Menbal, more commonly known as Nazlet al-Nasara (Matay district) in the north of Minya. They attacked Copts, their property and the church against the backdrop of a Muslim man sexually harassing a Coptic young woman. A number of Muslims stormed into the church of Prince Tadros al-Mashriky. Coincidentally, there was only one person, Ibrahim Eid, in the church. He was attacked with a sharp blade that led to his injury. The aggressors also threw rocks and stones at all the doors and windows of the church, leading to the injury of two additional people, the destruction of the church door, two pharmacies, two shops and a bakery.</p>	<p>A reconciliation session was held between Muslim and Coptic elders in the district. It resulted in:</p> <p>Imposing a financial penalty on the aggressors who attacked the Copts and the church, amounting to LE200,000 for their attack on the church of Prince Tadros al-Mashriky in Menbal. Imposing a financial penalty on the families of the aggressors, amounting to LE100,000 for their attacks against the Copts, their shops and pharmacies.</p> <p>Imposing a penalty clause of LE500,000 in case of breach of contract.</p> <p>After the session, the priest Macarius, the church pastor, relinquished the money as the members of both sides reconciled. They pledged to respect the reconciliation and not to renew conflict.</p>
35	<p>June 12, 2013</p> <p>Forced displacement, against the backdrop of the accusation of a Christian man of defamation of Islam in Radisseya village in Aswan</p>	<p>Dozens of Muslims from the village of Radisseya (Edfu district) demonstrated in front of a mosque in the village, demanding that the Christian young man, Fouad Dawood Youssef, be turned over to them. The residents accused the young man of defamation of Islam and insulting the prophet. The church pastor and others called on Muslim elders to prevent the escalation of the situation. Communication also took place with security entities.</p>	<p>A customary session was held on the evening of the next day. The participants agreed on:</p> <p>Distancing three of the suspect's siblings from the village for around a month until the situation calmed down completely.</p> <p>Continuing with the trial and the legal proceedings against the suspect.</p> <p>The immediate return of the suspect's sister, which was enforced.</p>



36	<p>August 3, 2013</p> <p>Sectarian attacks on villages in Minya for political reasons</p>	<p>The village of Beni-Ahmed al-Sharkeya, five kilometers south of Minya, witnessed sectarian clashes and attacks against the backdrop of a fight between the supporters of ousted President Mohamed Morsi and Copts in the village. The clashes resulted in the injury of a number of citizens, the burning and looting of a large number of houses and property owned by Copts. Additionally, the church and the mosque's minaret were damaged. Muslims from several neighboring villages joined in the attacks.</p>	<p>A customary reconciliation session was held on Sunday August 11, at the home of former Member of Parliament (on behalf of the dissolved National Democratic Party), Alaa al-Sebeay. The session was held in the presence of Major General Osama Deif, the general secretary for the governorate and representatives of five villages (Beni-Ahmed al-Sharqeya, Beni-Ahmed al-Gharbeya, Reida, al-Orban and al-Awam) along with a number of the religious leaders and senior officials in the government. The arbitration committee consisted of seven members, five of whom were affiliated with the Islamic group (Al-Jama'a al-Islameya). The terms of agreement were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accepting the arbitration council.</li> <li>Withdrawing all lawsuits and police reports.</li> <li>Imposing a penalty of LE2 million on the aggressors. The implementation of this penalty was left up to the council, which it based on witness statements or by accepting an oath regarding an account of the incident.</li> </ul> <p>In any one party causes a rift between the people of the village, they would be expelled from the village with the consent of the two sides, after the council issues a decision to this effect. Setting up an eight-member committee from the village's residents that would contain any rifts before they arise.</p> <p>No fights or quarrels are to take place near places of worship, such as mosques and churches. Such places should be considered a red line. This reconciliation deals with past disputes, offering anew clean slate.</p>
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37	<p>September 27, 2013. Attacks and forced displacement in Ezbet Zakaria in Minya, over the existence of a romantic relationship between a Christian man and a Muslim woman</p>	<p>Copts from Ezbet Zakaria (in Minya district) faced attacks from the Muslims of the village and other neighboring villages against the backdrop of a rumor about a romantic relationship between a Christian man and Muslim young woman. The attacks led to two Coptic houses being set on fire, along with a private car. Attempts to attack the church of Al-Ne'ma Al-Rasouleya in the village also took place. Assailants also threw rocks and stones at the houses of Copts in the village.</p>	<p>A customary reconciliation session was held on September 29, in the presence of security, religious and community leaders, where it was decided to fine the young man LE150,000 and to expel him, along with his family (six siblings and their respective families) from the village. Both sides rejected this and the Muslim side angrily protested. Hundreds of Muslims from the three villages (Edmua, Damshir and Abu al-Dahab) gathered and shots were fired in the direction of the Copts' houses. They set fire to four houses owned by Copts and a store of electric and sanitary appliances owned by the father of the suspect, Thabet Sadeq. A second customary session was held on October 2, 2013, in the presence of representatives of families from the village and neighboring villages, some Muslim and Christian religious clergy and security forces. The session ended with the agreement to expel the Coptic young man, his father, the young Muslim woman, her mother and her brother. The two sides accepted this agreement</p>
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38	<p>November 28, 2013. Four killed in clashes between two villages in Minya – one predominantly populated by Muslims and the other by Christians</p>	<p>Armed clashes took place between residents of Hawarteh village (predominantly Muslim) and Nazlet Ebeid village (predominantly Christian) when the Muslims of Hawarteh refused to allow a Christian man to build a house on land he owns on the outskirts of the neighboring village. The beginning of the clashes led to the death of four citizens: Mohamed Saber Mohamed Shehata (25 years), Soad Mahmoud Hegazy (36 years), Gerges Kamal Habib (27 years) and Abdel Maseeh Eyad Fanous (54 years). Additionally, around thirty people on both sides were injured. Two houses owned by Copts were set on fire on the outskirts of the village of Nazlet Ebeid. Additionally, a car belonging to a Christian man from the neighboring village of Nazlet Faragallah was set on fire.</p>	<p>A customary reconciliation session was held on December 14, under the auspices of the security director in Minya, Major General Osama Metwally, and the council of Arab tribes and government officials from the governorates in the neighboring village of Arab al-Sheikh Mohamed. The resulting terms of agreement were: The Copts of the village of Nazlet Ebeid are not to build on the land they own which borders the village of Hawarteh. Instead, the land under dispute (in Hawarteh) is to be exchanged with someone from the village of Nazlet Ebeid. The Copts are to pay blood money (Diya) for the two murdered Copts and the Muslims are to pay the blood money for the families of the two murdered Muslims. The residents are not to enter the village of Hawarteh through the western bridge indefinitely. A payment of LE110,000 is to be made in partnership between the Muslims and the Christians. This is the price of a car belonging to one of the Copts from the village of Nazlet Faragallah that borders the village of Hawarteh. Muslims from Hawarteh had set the car on fire when it was coincidentally passing by. The Copts of Nazlet Ebeid are not to go out of the village, even for work, for 15 days after the reconciliation. The relinquishing of all legal and civil rights, and refraining from antagonizing one another.</p>
39	<p>December 23, 2013. A customary session dictates the moving of a church from its location in the district of Bibba, south of Beni Suef</p>	<p>The Muslims of Tarshoub village (Bibba district), south of Beni Suef, closed St. George church and forced the church pastor to leave, after one of the Muslim neighbors started a rumor about the Copts installing a church bell at the gates of the church.</p>	<p>A customary reconciliation session was held at the district of Bibba, in Beni Suef, in the presence of Major General Zakaria Abu Zeina, head of the criminal investigative unit and the head of the Bibba district, a number of arbitrators and a number of people party to the conflict from the village of Tarshoub. The participants agreed to close down the current church, which was built 20 years ago, and to allocate a different area in the village for a new church. The new area was a building hall that had not been used before. It was agreed that prayers would be held at that house until the new church is established including Christmas prayers.</p>

40	<p>February 11, 2014. A Muslim was killed, a family expelled, and a religious customary session held in Matareya in Cairo</p>	<p>An everyday fight erupted in Matareya in Cairo, between Mohamed Abdel Aziz and his brother Sayed Abdel Aziz on one side, and the members of the Christian Hitler family on the other. The fight erupted when the former placed quantities of cement and bricks in front of a furniture shop owned by the latter. Members of the Muslim family rallied supporters in front of the homes of the Christian family. They fired shots in a random manner and the Christian families fired back. The clashes led to the death of Hamdi Abbas, a member of the Muslim Samta family. The security forces arrested thirteen people from the two related Christian families, Hitler and Zaghoul.</p>	<p>On June 9, 2014, a reconciliation session was held in the sports club of Matereya, under the auspices of the security leadership. It was attended by Major General Yehia al-Iraqy, deputy to Cairo security chief and Major General Khalid Youssef, deputy chief of Cairo, the director of the investigation unit north of Cairo, the head of Matareya police station, in addition to other security leaders. Other religious and Islamic leaders and representatives of al-Jam'iya al-Shar'iya also attended the session.</p> <p>The terms of agreement resulting from the sessions were:</p> <p>The Christian family is to present five shrouds and five calves, meaning that the life of a Muslim man is worth that of five Copts.</p> <p>Presenting a hundred camels according to the principle of blood money (diya) stipulated in Islam.</p> <p>The Christian side is to donate a 234 square meter piece of land and a million pounds to the building of a mosque and an orphanage with Al-Jam'iya al-Shar'iya</p> <p>Expelling all members of the Hitler family (62 members) from Matereya and selling their property within a maximum period of six months.</p> <p>The reconciliation is not to be taken to mean that the Muslim family is relinquishing its right to legal procedures with the public prosecutor and that this reconciliation would not be presented at the judicial hearings .</p> <p>A penalty of five million pounds is levied on the side which breaches the provisions of the customary session.</p>
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41	<p>March 28, 2014. An attack on a Copt's house over Muslims' fears he is converting it to a church</p>	<p>Nag' al-Nosayrat (Dar al-Salam district), in Sohag, witnessed sectarian attacks on the Copts of the village against the backdrop of a rumor that they were in the process of building a church. Hundreds of Muslims from Nag' attacked a reception hall under construction while chanting Islamic chants. The hall was owned by a Coptic man called Al-Nemr Aziz Hanna. The assailants attacked the workers, ruined the construction materials and burned some of it. Dozens of children walked past the houses of Copts, threw rocks at them and attempted to break into some of them.</p>	<p>A customary session was held and a written declaration was obtained from the owner of the land, in which he pledged to completely halt all construction until he obtained a license from the local unit for the district of Dar al-Salam. The declaration also stated that the building is to be used only as a house and nothing else.</p>
42	<p>June 1, 2014. Attacking and shutting down a Christian reception hall against the backdrop of a Christian's accusation of defamation of religion in Luxor</p>	<p>Sectarian tensions and attacks prevailed in the villages of Mahameed Bahary and Mahameed Qebly (Arment district), in Luxor, when a Christian young man clicked "like" on a Facebook page that was said to be insulting to the prophet. The attacks resulted in a number of commercial shops and Coptic-owned workshops being set on fire.</p>	<p>The "House of the Family" (Bait al-'Aila) convened a reconciliation customary session in Luxor in the presence of Al-Azhar scholars, church priests, from the district and city of Arment, and security leaders. The priests offered an apology over the incident and they agreed that until tensions calm down, in a few months, they would shut down the reception hall that the Christians used to hold religious lessons. The Coptic residents had passed by all the families of the village and offered their apologies for the incident.</p>

43	July 16, 2014 A Christian man is accused of sexually harassing a child in Luxor	Security forces arrested the Copt Gaber Aziz Derias (53 years), a waged worker, who lives in the village of Nag' al-Taweel (al-Tod district) in Luxor, upon receiving a complaint that he assaulted a seven-year-old male child. Some of the Muslim residents of the village placed a sign on the defendant's workshop that read "Quran recital teaching office." The security, along with some of the residents, objected to the sign. It was later removed.	The residents sponsored a customary session, where ten participants attended: nine Muslims and one Copt (the village sheikh). They decided on moving all the carpentry tools, the wooden works and household items out of the workshop, such that they would be entrusted to and stored by one of the Copts. It was also agreed to ban Gaber Aziz from working in the village in until he sells his property.
44	August 3, 2014. Objecting to the building of a church in the village of Yacoub al-Qebleya in Minya	Clashes erupted between Muslims and Christians in Ezbet Yacoub al-Qebleya (Samalot district) over the issue of proceeding with the construction of St. George church (already under construction at the time). A number of people from both sides sustained minor injuries.	Security forces sponsored a reconciliation customary session between the Muslims and Christians of the village. They obtained written declarations that obliged the Muslim side not to engage with, or return to, the reasons for the conflict. The Christian side pledged to halt construction until the necessary licenses were attained from the official entities. They also agreed on a penalty clause that binds the breaching party to pay half a million pounds. Later, the residents of the village were able to obtain the necessary permit and they resumed the construction process.
45	August 29, 2014. A fight between the Christians and Muslims of the village of Tayeba in Minya	An everyday fight took on a sectarian dimension in the predominantly Christian al-Tayeba village (Samalot district), north Minya. The fight started between the Christian Ghadayfa family and the Muslim Tarakwa family, when a car belonging to one of the family members ran over a member from the other family.	The two sides of the conflict signed a written declaration to reconcile and to relinquish the right to pursue further procedures, in an attempt to secure the release of those arrested. The prosecutor released them on the same day.