



Naga Hammadi: Witnesses to the Strife

Fact-Finding Mission Report

Freedom of Religion and Belief
Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
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Methodology

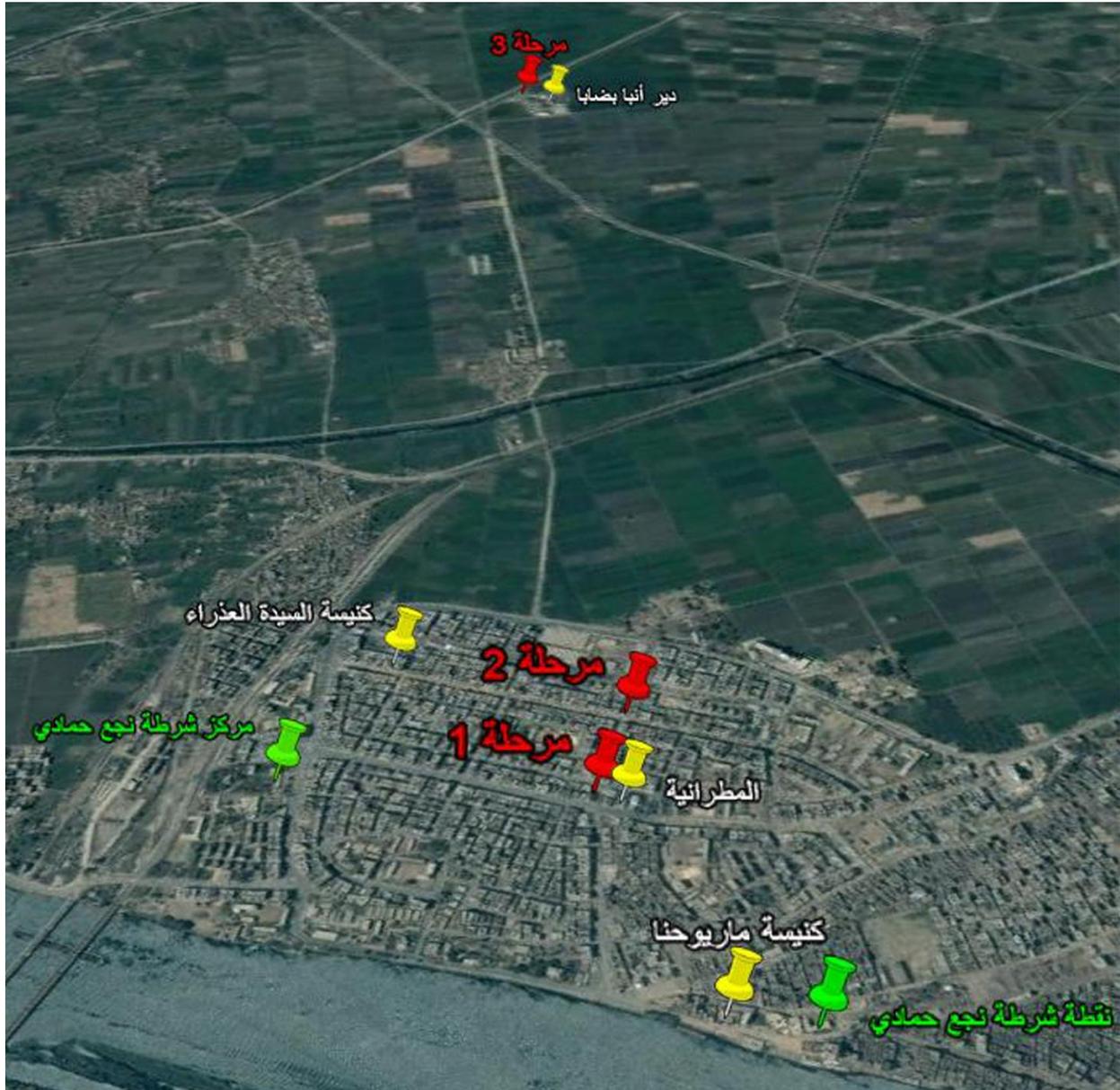
This report is based on statements collected by a fact-finding mission sent by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) to the Naga Hammadi district on 12-13 January 2010; the mission comprised two researchers, Ahmed Mahgoub and Ishaq Ibrahim. The investigators visited the city of Naga Hammadi and the villages of Bahgoura and Izbat Tarkas, where they collected statements from eyewitnesses, the injured, relatives of the victims and clerics. The report also relies on statements from Nader Shukri, a journalist and an advisor to EIPR's Freedom of Religion and Belief Program, who was present in Naga Hammadi and Bahgoura from 7 to 9 January 2010. EIPR researchers conducted telephone interviews with some witnesses who could not be personally interviewed by the fact-finding mission, as well as with several people injured in the attacks on 6 January who were receiving medical treatment in the city of Sohag.

The EIPR has maintained anonymity for most witnesses who gave statements, either at their own request or to ensure their personal safety. It has provided the full names of the victims, the injured and shop owners who came under attack as documented in official police reports. This report relays witnesses' statements verbatim, with occasional interventions only to replace colloquial usages with standard Arabic and English expressions.

Acknowledgements

This report was written by Ishaq Ibrahim, Ahmed Mahgoub and Hossam Bahgat; Ramy Raouf provided additional research support in documenting the media coverage of the events in Naga Hammadi.

Map of the Events



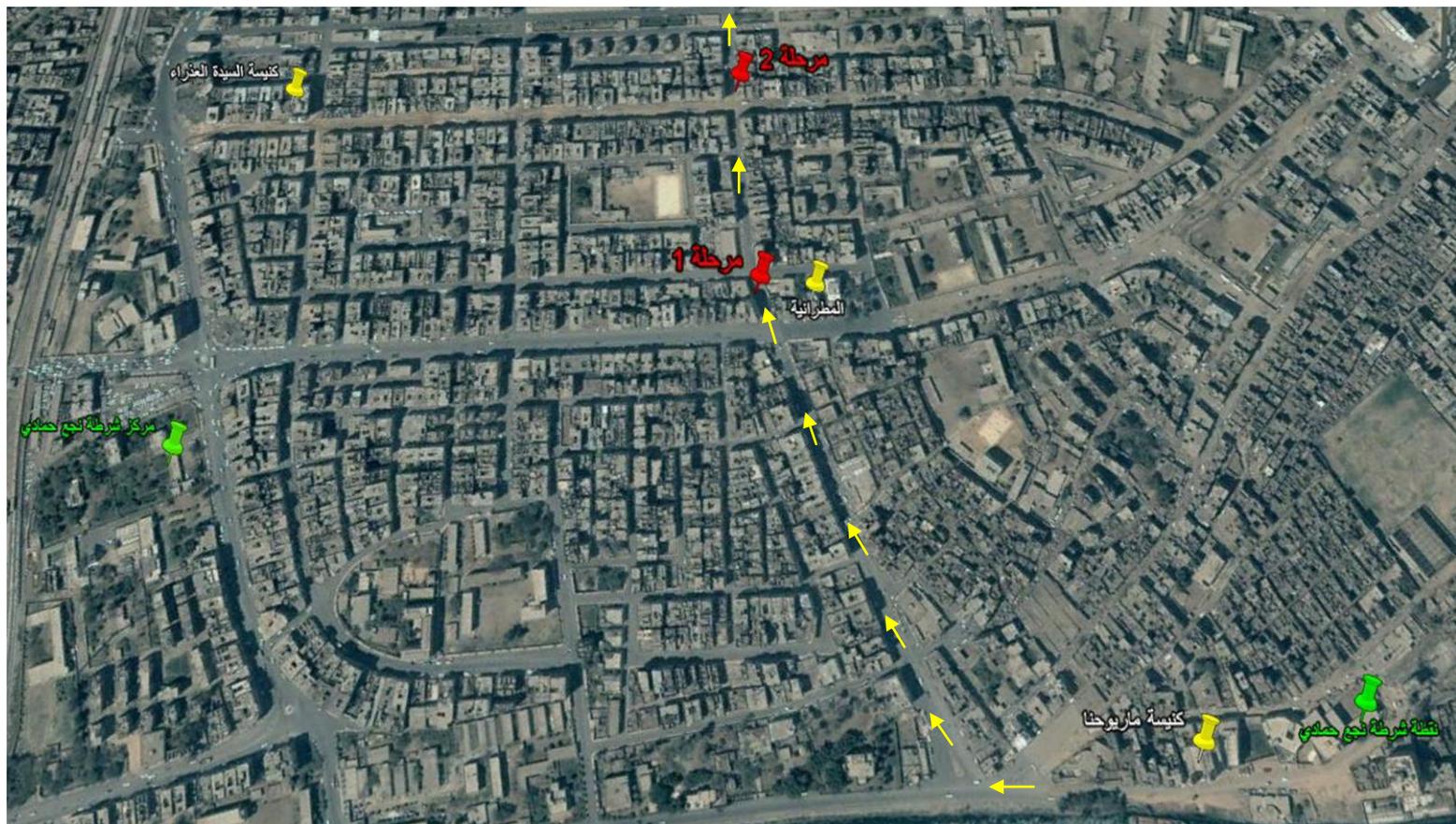
Map key:

Yellow arrow: indicates the trail of the perpetrators as documented by the EIPR

Yellow box: indicates the location of nearby churches

Red box: indicates the site of gunfire over three phases

Green box: indicates nearby police locations



Chapter 1: Background to the Events

1. Background information on Naga Hammadi and the intersection of religion and politics

The events that took place in the city of Naga Hammadi and the surrounding villages in January 2010 cannot be addressed without a better understanding of its inhabitants' religious composition. It is also important to have a better understanding of the key developments over the last two decades not only in Muslim-Christian relations but also in the relationship between lay Copts and the Coptic clerical establishment on the one hand, and political officials and the security apparatus on the other.

The district of Naga Hammadi, located in the Qena governorate, includes the city of Naga Hammadi as well as several local municipalities, most importantly, the village of Bahgoura, where Christians constitute 40% of the population, according to church sources. Tribalism is dominant in the district given that most of the Muslim residents belong to the Arab, Hawara and al-Ashraf tribes. Various clans live in the city itself and most of their members work in state administration or one of the two large plants producing aluminum and sugar. Church sources estimate that Christians constitute 20% of the population in the district as a whole, but nearly 40% of the city's population (Naga Hammadi). Father Kyrillos, the bishop of Naga Hammadi, Farshout and Abu Tisht, has been the Coptic leader for the local Coptic community since 1977. The city not only houses the seat of the bishopric, but is also home to two churches, Mar Yuhanna and the Church of the Virgin and the St. Bedaba Monastery (located on the outskirts of the city).

Although Christian-Muslim relations in the district are characterized largely by peaceful coexistence, the last two decades have seen several incidents that have undermined this pattern. The worst of these took place in the late 1990s in the midst of the armed conflict between Islamist insurgents and the Egyptian state, during which members of Islamist groups attacked and assassinated Copts, tourists and state officials. Naga Hammadi witnessed a violent terrorist incident in March 1997 when three Islamists opened fire on residents of Izbat Kamel Takla in Bahgoura. The armed militants opened fire on patrons in a Coptic tailor's shop and then continued the shooting spree by targeting people sitting in front of their homes. The armed militants had initially targeted the St. Shenouda Church and the local police station but they failed in attacking the two buildings due to heavy security. According to statements made by church sources to the EIPR, the incident left 13 people dead, among them nine Copts.

In the last few years, there have been signs of increasing sectarian tension in the region sparked by religious conversions. Significantly, the Naga Hammadi diocese issued a statement in December 2006, signed by Father Kyrillos, condemning "the irresponsible practices that harm national unity and inflame sectarian strife among the children of

one nation when certain bad elements approach young people in difficult financial straits and use both lawful and unlawful means to deceive them into abandoning their faith and converting to Islam. Thus far, this has happened with two young men from Bahgoura and Naga Hammadi, who live in the home of a person in the al-Waziri area." The diocese urged state authorities to "immediately intervene to stop this meddling with the nation's security."

Yet, the most important factor for Muslim-Coptic relations over the last decade has been the prominent political role played by the Naga Hammadi bishopric in the parliamentary elections. The bishopric had actively secured a high voter turnout by Copts, thereby fostering political tensions. Sources say that Father Kyrillos has realized that Copts constitute an important voting bloc, with as many as 20,000 people eligible to vote in parliamentary elections for the Naga Hammadi district, according to some estimates. All EIPR sources agreed that this constituency played a significant role in the 2000 elections when MP Abd al-Rahim al-Ghoul, a prominent MP with the ruling National Democratic Party who had occupied the district's worker seat for nearly 30 years, was ousted. Al-Ghoul has poor relations with the church, which has accused him of anti-Coptic prejudice and a failure to address their concerns. In the five years in which al-Ghoul was not an MP, relations between Father Kyrillos and General Adel Labib, the governor of Qena from 1999 to 2006, were strengthened and the bishop's influence grew. In this period, he was able to obtain the permits necessary to complete renovations on both the St. Bedaba Monastery and the Church of the Virgin in Naga Hammadi. The former governor also participated in celebrations and youth activities organized by the church.

The bishopric continued to play a prominent political role in the 2005 parliamentary elections. The NDP slated another candidate for the worker's seat while Abd al-Rahim al-Ghoul ran in the elections as an independent. Several sources spoke about harassment of Copts by al-Ghoul's partisans on the day of the runoff election, 26 November 2005, with the objective of preventing them from voting. The bishop had declared his support for the NDP candidate and mobilized Copts to vote for him. As soon as al-Ghoul was declared the winner of the runoff, his supporters organized demonstrations that targeted homes and shops owned by Copts as well as some churches, particularly on Mohamed Hosni Mubarak St., Port Said St. and Gomhouriya St. The demonstrators broke down the doors of shops and houses with clubs and metal implements and chanted anti-Christian slurs and some slogans aimed specifically at Father Kyrillos. In the village of Bahgoura, al-Ghoul supporters rallied in areas with a high Coptic concentration, specifically Abu Asal, Naga Eissa and al-Nuqrashi St., where they smashed doors and repeated anti-Coptic slogans.

A statement issued by the Naga Hammadi diocese, signed by the bishop on 10 December 2005, addressed this harassment and condemned "the unfortunate events that took place on Saturday, 26 November 2005, which sought to undermine national unity and shake security and stability through assaults on the property of Coptic

citizens and the intimidation of Copts by supporters of an independent candidate in the parliamentary elections (10th district). The diocese also condemns slogans that derided Christianity and Christians and demeaned religious symbols. The diocese reiterates that these irresponsible practices have not and will not undermine the fixed principles of the nation and its fabric." According to information obtained by the EIPR, state authorities conducted no investigation of the harassment or sectarian attacks that took place in those elections.

In 2006, a gubernatorial shuffle brought in General Magdi Ayoub as the governor of Qena, the sole Coptic governor in Egypt. Yet, the new governor showed no enthusiasm for strengthening relations with church leaders, especially Father Kyrillos. The cold relations were reflected in decrees issued by the new governor, who chose to remain distant from church leaders.

Aside from their importance in understanding the political and sectarian history of the region, a review of these events is critical because several witnesses who spoke with EIPR researchers made a connection between the Coptic Christmas attacks this year and the impending parliamentary elections, scheduled for fall 2010.

When EIPR researchers asked one eyewitness to the Christmas shootings his opinion about the background to the attacks, he said, "I live in another governorate, but my family is from the Bahgoura area. I arrived in Bahgoura two days before the holiday and heard some talk of 'a present for the Christians on Christmas Eve.' What I heard was that something bad would happen to break the voting power of the Copts who follow the directives of Father Kyrillos in the Naga Hammadi diocese."¹

Another witness from the city of Naga Hammadi who was present during the shooting said that perhaps the incident was attributable to the fact that "the church is involved in politics and Father Kyrillos is known for controlling the Christian vote."²

Another Coptic resident of Bahgoura stated, "The hatred has been around for a long time. It didn't start today, especially because the Copts have an influential voice in politics. [One MP] always talks about his hatred of Christians and is fighting with the church...to the extent that he sloganeers and incites people against the other MP because he approved renovations to the Church of the Virgin and the St. Bedaba Monastery in Naga Hammadi."

When EIPR researchers met with Father Kyrillos in Naga Hammadi a week after the attacks, he made the same vague allusions to the political and electoral background to the attacks, but refused to clarify: "The incident is a terrorist act because the Christians of Naga Hammadi have social and political standing. No possibility can be discounted

¹ EIPR interview with an eyewitness who requested anonymity, 13 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

² EIPR interview with an eyewitness who requested anonymity, 12 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena

here. It's possible that the reason was a political maneuver, especially because elections are around the corner and Christians are an influential constituency."³

Therefore, it is vitally important to review the circumstances of the 2005 elections in order to understand the role that Hamam al-Kamouni, the prime suspect in the 2010 attacks, appears to have played in MP Abd al-Rahim al-Ghoul's the electoral campaign.

Hala El Masry, a blogger and Coptic activist living in Qena who took part in monitoring the 2005 elections, wrote about the 2010 attacks on her blog: "...I am not forgetting what Hamam al-Kamouni and his supporters did the day of the last parliamentary elections, when they tried to harass Copts so they wouldn't go out in the streets and wouldn't vote for the NDP candidate who had replaced al-Ghoul on the party list; how he harassed and molested Coptic women and did things punishable by law; and how after independent candidate al-Ghoul won, he led the demonstration and the campaign to intimidate and discipline Copts in the streets of Naga Hammadi."⁴

The official newspaper *al-Ahram* also raised questions after the Christmas attacks about al-Kamouni's relationship with MP al-Ghoul, publishing three photos of al-Ghoul in campaign meetings with al-Kamouni next to him.⁵ In a later edition, the same paper denied all "rumors" about any relationship between the two men.⁶

It is also worth noting that a statement issued by the Public Prosecutor's Office regarding the indictment of the three suspects in the attacks included a note that "police investigations revealed no indications that anyone was involved in inciting these events." The EIPR stresses the urgent need for a full, independent investigation of the circumstances that led to these crimes.

2. Events in Farshout, November 2009

Only a few hours after the attacks in Naga Hammadi, the Ministry of Interior issued a brief statement noting, "There are preliminary indications of a link between this incident and a case in which a Christian youth was accused of raping a Muslim girl in a village in the governorate."⁷ The ministry did not however provide a source for this speculation, which was issued before any suspects were identified or apprehended. The suspects turned themselves in on 8 January 2010, which is when the prosecutor's investigation began.

³ EIPR interview with Father Kyrillos, the bishop of Naga Hammadi, 13 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena

⁴ Hala El Masry, "Ayadi al-ijram al-khafiya fi majzarat al-milad," <http://halaemasry2.blogspot.com/2010/01/blog-post_14.html#links>.

⁵ 'Abd al-Jawad 'Ali, et. al., "Tadmud al-jirah fi Naj' Hammadi," *al-Ahram*, 15 Jan. 2010.

⁶ Ahmad Musa, "al-Na'ib al-'amm yu'lin haqa'iq Naj' Hammadi," *al-Ahram*, 17 Jan. 2010.

⁷ Security statement on the shooting of Christians in the city of Naga Hammadi, Ministry of Interior, 7 Jan. 2010.

A statement issued by the Public Prosecutor's Office on 16 January 2010 on the indictment of the suspects said that investigations by the office had concluded that the assaults were perpetrated by "a group of lawbreakers who divested themselves of any ethical, religious or social values by claiming that they were motivated by the rape of a Muslim girl in a nearby district and their viewing of footage of Muslim girls being molested and demeaned."

Thus far no information has become available about the source or nature of the footage referred to in the Public Prosecutor's statement; nevertheless, the security and judicial narrative continues to link the Coptic Christmas Eve attacks with the rape of a girl in the Farshout district, located next to Naga Hammadi in Qena (and also part of the Naga Hammadi diocese), in November 2009. Officials with the ruling party and other influential figures have also made the same link. A number of residents of Naga Hammadi, both Copts and Muslims, expressed doubts about this official story however, which they believe attempts to equate the perpetrators of the two crimes and portray the Naga Hammadi attacks as an individual, rather than sectarian, crime committed by a Muslim in the face of another individual crime committed by a Copt.

Although the EIPR does not have sufficient information and evidence to identify the motive of the Naga Hammadi crime, particularly since the trial of the suspects had not begun as of the release of this report, it is certain that events that took place in Farshout in November 2009 and the security and judicial agencies' response to these events played a role in heightening the sectarian tension that exploded on Coptic Christmas Eve. The EIPR also believes that shooting at Copts to kill them simply because they are Christians should be described and addressed as a sectarian attack, both in terms of its causes and nature, regardless of any justification given by the perpetrators of the crime itself.

Events in Farshout began on 18 November 2009, when a Muslim family in the village of al-Shaqifi, located in the Abu Tisht district of Qena, accused a Christian youth, Girgis Baroumi Girgis, 21, a resident of al-Kom al-Ahmar, located in the Farshout district, of raping their 12-year-old daughter after forcing her to accompany him to a nearby field. Security forces arrested the suspect the same day; he was questioned and detained for four days pending an investigation.

The day after the Muslim family filed the rape complaint, the Farshout district and its villages, as well as some villages in the neighboring Abu Tisht district, saw early warnings of sectarian tension, starting on Thursday, 19 November, and becoming worse until they exploded on 21-23 November.

On 19 November, Father Benjamin Nashi, the pastor of the Church of the Archangel and St. Shenouda, located in the village of al-Khawalid in the Abu Tisht district, was returning to his home in al-Qalaiya in his private car with a deacon, Murtada Gaber Rizqallah. A group of young men carrying clubs, knives and firearms stopped the car before the al-Shaqifi village, where the family of the raped Muslim girl lives.

According to a statement given to EIPR researchers by Father Benjamin, the assailants began beating the priest and the deacon and broke the car's windshield, although a police car was parked next to the young men. Father Benjamin attempted to call for help, but the police took no action to come to his aid. The priest added that the deacon received medical treatment at the Abu Tisht Hospital for a head injury and bruising behind his ear. He filed a police report about the incident, after which his car was taken to the police station for inspection to confirm the report. On the morning of 21 November, he decided to withdraw the complaint, "in fear of harassment," he said.⁸

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

At dawn on Saturday, 21 November, fires erupted at three shops owned by Christians in Farshout at about 2:30 am. Saturday morning the local priests warned Christians against opening their shops and pharmacies, fearing that some Muslims might harass them or attack their property.

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

According to witnesses, the crowd that gathered outside the police station on 21 November numbered several thousand and included Muslims from al-Shaqifi and nearby villages as well as many Azhar students in Farshout. The crowd began moving in separate groups that attacked Christian-owned property, broke down shop doors, and burned and looted them. The attacks began at about 11 am and continued without interruption until 10 pm, as the groups moved from one area to another. Several victims and eyewitnesses stated that security arrived about 90 minutes after the assaults began, but did not try to stop any of the assailants for several hours. The EIPR also received photos and video footage from the Naga Hammadi diocese and some Coptic websites showing the assaults underway despite the presence of security forces nearby.

⁸ EIPR telephone interview with Father Benjamin Nashi, Dec. 2009.

The security forces imposed order on Saturday evening, after calling for additional forces from the Sohag and Assyout governorates. Many sources told EIPR researchers that security forces arrested about 70 of the assailants and referred them to the prosecutor, who ordered the release of 15 minors and three adults, detaining 52 others for 15 days pending an investigation; the detainees were charged with rioting, assembly, arson and destruction of private property. Throughout December and January, several of the detainees were released for various reasons, but an unknown number are still in detention as of the release of this report, with no indictment order yet issued.

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

Several other villages in the Farshout district also saw attacks on Copts' property: a pharmacy owned by a Copt in the village of al-Qara was set on fire at dawn on Sunday, 22 November; there were clashes between Muslims and Copts in the village of al-Araki the evening of the same day, after which some Muslims set fire to agricultural land owned by a Copt; in the village of al-Qubeibi, the courtyard of a Christian's home was torched, but there were no losses.

The attacks spread to the village of Abu Shousha, located in the nearby Abu Tisht district, 30 km from al-Shaqifi, where a pharmacy and three shops owned by Copts were torched at dawn on 23 November. According to a statement from Father Boulos Nazir, a priest at the Abu Shousha church, the afternoon of the same day groups of Muslims set fire to houses, shops and property owned by Christians in the village of al-Kom al-Ahmar.

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

In the days following the attacks, the security apparatus convened small meetings with families in the villages of Farshout and Abu Tisht to caution them to maintain calm, refrain from attacking the lives or property of Christians and avoid listening to any incendiary ideas, according to one of the people who attended these meetings.

The security apparatus asked the church and the victims to convene a broad, official reconciliation meeting to cover the entire district of Farshout; the church refused, asking for compensation before holding the reconciliation meeting.

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

Chapter 2: Early Warning Signs

Could the Naga Hammadi attacks have been anticipated?

On 14 January 2010, a delegation from the People's Assembly arrived in Naga Hammadi after the assault on the city's Copts to offer their condolences to the victims of the attacks. The delegation met General Adli Fayed, the Deputy Minister of Interior for General Security, as well as several security leaders and media representatives in the Police Club of Naga Hammadi. During the meeting, the deputy minister stated that the security apparatus "had no information regarding the incident in Naga Hammadi; it would have been capable of preventing it had information been available."⁹

The information, testimonies and evidence gathered by the EIPR leads us to conclude that this statement is false. The local and even district security agencies had adequate evidence indicating that the area might be witness to violence on Coptic Christmas Eve. In turn, the security apparatus failed to anticipate and prepare for these crimes, whether it knew (or should have known) that they were likely to take place at the time and location that they did.

The EIPR fact-finding mission met a Coptic priest at the Naga Hammadi diocese, who asked to remain anonymous. He stated, "Father Kyrillos convened a meeting with the priests of the diocese on 4 January 2010 and asked them to end the Christmas mass early because he feared clashes or tension after the service."¹⁰

⁹ Hamada 'Ashur, "Musa'id wazir al-dakhiliya yanfi 'ilm al-amn al-musabbaq bi-wuqu' madhbahat Naj' Hammadi wa-l-Ghul yattahim al-i'lam bi-tadkhim al-hadith," *al-Dustur*, 16 Jan. 2010.

¹⁰ EIPR interview with a priest at the diocese of Naga Hammadi who requested anonymity, 13 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

This meeting was specifically mentioned by several other testimonies collected by EIPR researchers from different sources in Naga Hammadi, Bahgoura, Farshout and other churches in the diocese. A Christian citizen from Bahgoura also told EIPR researchers that he had received the same warnings from a priest: "Father Kyrillos had told the priests to end the mass early and they in turn gave these directives to their flocks. Even on New Year's Eve, for example, church let out at 10:30 pm, although usually the services end after midnight. On Christmas Eve too, it let out early, even though according to the liturgy the fast can be broken only after midnight."¹¹

Another witness confirmed this in a statement to the EIPR fact-finding mission: "I arrived in town two days before the holiday and heard rumors. I learned that some locals had decided to celebrate the holiday with relatives in Qena and Sohag, far from the troubles, but most people went as usual to the Mar Yuhanna Church in Naga Hammadi, where Father Kyrillos leads the mass and senior Muslim officials come to wish us a happy holiday. At the church, there were even more rumors, but what made me think that they were only rumors was that life seemed very normal in Naga Hammadi despite the incident in Farshout, the rumor of a 'Christmas gift' and the security warnings. There were no guards in front of the diocese building or the churches, which led me to believe that they were just rumors."¹²

From the time of the attacks on Wednesday evening, 6 January, until Saturday evening, 9 January, Father Kyrillos gave dozens of media interviews to the local and foreign press saying that he had received threats before the holiday that violence would take place and that it would target him personally or Copts in general. Nader Shukri, a journalist with *Watani*, attended a press conference called by the bishop in the diocese headquarters with several other journalists who arrived in Naga Hammadi Friday morning, 8 January, to cover reactions to the assassinations and subsequent violence. He told the EIPR, "I reached Naga Hammadi on Thursday evening. On Friday morning, journalists began to arrive and Father Kyrillos spoke to them. He said he had expected violence and that the security apparatus failed to protect the church. He refused to link the attacks to the incidents in Farshout because Upper Egyptians usually pursue vendettas themselves rather than hire others to do it for them. And al-Kamouni [a suspect at the time] is not religious."¹³

Perhaps the most important statement by far regarding the climate before the attacks and whether they surprised the security apparatus is the statement of Pakinam Amer, a journalist with *al-Masry al-Youm's* English edition, who reached Naga Hammadi a day before the attacks and attended mass at the Mar Yuhanna Church, near the site of the shooting. In an interview with EIPR researchers, Amer said, "I intended to go to Farshout to attend mass there and write about the tension and fear felt by Copts

¹¹ EIPR interview with an eyewitness who requested anonymity, 13 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

¹² EIPR interview with an eyewitness who requested anonymity, 13 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

¹³ EIPR interview with Nader Shukri, 11 Jan. 2010, Cairo.

because of the violence [of November 2009], but when I went to Farshout, Father Elisha, the priest at the Church of the Archangel in Farshout, told me that Father Kyrillos had received threats of violence on Christmas Eve, and that if anything bad were to happen, it would happen in Naga Hammadi and not Farshout. When I went to Naga Hammadi on 6 January, I met Father Kyrillos before the mass and he told me that he had moved the time of the mass up so that it could end early, in fear of attacks.”¹⁴

A few hours before the attacks, Pakinam Amer sent her Cairo bureau an article titled, “Shadow of Violence, Displacement Looms over Christian Holidays in Upper Egypt.” In the article, she documents the wariness and anxiety of Farshout residents one day before the assaults in neighboring Naga Hammadi. According to the article, only one woman, in addition to the priest, was present in the Farshout church. When Amer asked why the biggest church in Farshout was empty despite the 15,000 Copts in the village, a local resident told her that “Christians were scared by talk of violence against them...[and] that rumors had it that churches have been receiving threats from Muslim extremists.”¹⁵ In the same dispatch, Father Elisha told the journalist that “Christians feel insecure everywhere now and they expect violence at any moment.” In a significant statement that suggests that the security police knew about the sectarian tensions, Father Elisha said that members of the security apparatus spoke with him about rumors that spread following the attacks on Copts’ property in Farshout, that Christians were planning retaliatory attacks, including the burning of a mosque—rumors that the priest denied.

In the next article by Pakinam Amer, the journalist reported that some Copts she spoke to on Wednesday morning in Naga Hammadi told her that they would not attend mass at the church out of “fear for their lives.” A man from Farshout added that he would watch Pope Shenouda’s sermon on television.¹⁶ The article also reported that Father Kyrillos told Amer before the mass that he was worried about violence on Coptic Christmas Eve.

EIPR researchers could not verify if the bishop Father Kyrillos had officially informed security about the threats he and other Copts in Naga Hammadi had received prior to the attacks. Starting on Saturday, 9 January, the bishop began back-tracking from many of the statements he had made to the media regarding his expectations of violence and the security failure. When the EIPR fact-finding mission asked him about this during a visit to the diocese, he refused to provide details, but only said, “One of my duties is to calm the situation to avoid more losses, because I have martyrs, injured people and

¹⁴ EIPR telephone interview with Pakinam Amer, 19 Jan. 2010.

¹⁵ Pakinam Amer, “Shadow of Violence, Displacement Looms over Christian Holidays in Upper Egypt,” *al-Masry al-Youm*, 7 Jan. 2010.

¹⁶ Pakinam Amer, “Copts in Wrath Following Egypt’s Bloodiest Christmas,” *al-Masry al-Youm*, 7 Jan. 2010.

detained people. They all come to the church and ask me to intervene. A person with his hand in water is not like a person with his hand in the fire. We demand justice and the apprehension of the perpetrators and that a deterrent punishment be given to prevent a repeat of these events."¹⁷

Nevertheless, it is certain that the conditions in Naga Hammadi and Farshout in the days and weeks before the Coptic Christmas Eve attacks were clear enough to warrant the attention of the security apparatus at the very least. This necessitates an investigation into the failure of the security apparatus to anticipate and prepare for these crimes.

Chapter 3: The Christmas Eve Crime

Could the Naga Hammadi attacks have been prevented?

In light of the threats and tensions in Naga Hammadi and the surrounding villages, detailed in the previous chapter, priests and their parishioners in Naga Hammadi changed the time at which the Christmas Eve mass would end, from the usual midnight to a little after 10 pm. Nevertheless, the fact that most families left the city churches after mass did not prevent the perpetrators from carrying out the attack on Coptic youths gathered near the churches.

According to official reports and eyewitness statements, three people committed the crime. In an official statement, the Interior Ministry said that they turned themselves in to the police on 8 January after their hideout was surrounded. The suspects in the case are Mohamed Ahmed Mohamed Hussein (known as Hamam al-Kamouni), who drove the car and opened fire on the gathered Copts, as well as Qurashi Abu al-Haggag Mohamed Ali and Hindawi Mohamed Sayyid Hassan, who abetted the commission of the crime. The perpetrators' car set out from Port Said St. toward the Nile Corniche, after which al-Kamouni opened fire on a group of young men near the diocese headquarters. The car drove further and fire was opened on another group at the intersection of Port Said St. and March 30th St., where the Church of the Virgin is located. The car then headed toward the Cairo-Aswan Agricultural Road adjacent to the city, where the suspects stopped a taxi near the St. Bedaba Monastery. The suspects forced the Muslim driver out of the taxi and then opened fire on the Christian passengers.

The attack left seven people dead, among them a Muslim warrant officer who completed his service that day, Ayman Sadeq Hashem, 28. Six of the dead were Copts ages 17-29: Rafiq Rifaat William, Abanub Kamal Nashed, Ayman Zakaria Luqa, Bula Atef Yassi, Bishoi Farid Labib and Mina Hilmi Said. Nine other Copts were injured: Ibram Nabil Youssef, Kyrillos Wagih Masri, Wagdi Shenouda Fathi, Rami Rasmi Agib,

¹⁷ EIPR interview with Father Kyrillos, the bishop of Naga Hammadi, 13 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

Abanub Nashaat Sarid, Joseph Samuel Basha, Ishaq Adel Tadros, Michael Salah Rasem and Shenouda Munir Shuhdi.

Shenouda Munir Shuhdi, 20, was hit by two bullets in the shoulder and arm. He spoke to EIPR researchers on the telephone while in the Sohag Hospital, saying, “The day of the holiday I was standing in front of the Lukas Company, and the martyrs Bula and Abanub were standing in front of me, about 10-15 meters from the diocese building. Suddenly I heard gunfire. I had barely turned around when a bullet hit me in my right shoulder and came out my body. Another bullet entered the right side of my arm and also exited because I was so close to the source of gunfire, which I could not see. There was no security presence and it was all over in minutes. No ambulance arrived, so my friends took me to the Naga Hammadi Hospital, where I was shocked to find a nurse rather than a doctor giving me an exam. She even ordered me to lie down so she could sew up the wound. I refused and asked for a doctor, but could not find one. I was taken to the Sohag General Hospital in an ambulance. The nurse told me, ‘These are our capabilities.’ In the Sohag Hospital, my treatment started, but I still can’t move my right hand and the doctor has not yet told me when I’ll be released. He stressed that I would need to continue physical therapy at home for a while to be able to use my hand again normally. I’m now paying the cost of medication and other treatment needs from my own pocket, even though I’m at a public hospital.”¹⁸

The mother of Kyrillos Wagih Masri, 16, a high school student, explained how her son had been injured by a bullet while standing with some of his friends in front of the Naga Hammadi diocese headquarters after the Christmas mass: “I learned from local residents that my son was injured by a gunshot. There was a general state of hysteria and panic. Kyrillos’ friends took him to the Naga Hammadi General Hospital and from there he was moved by ambulance to the Sohag General Hospital. Kyrillos was hit by one bullet that entered his right arm and exited on the opposite side, since he was close to the source. Two bullets in his left arm severely tore his skin, broke the bones of his arm and inflicted various injuries to his nerves. The doctors say that Kyrillos will be treated for some time in the hospital and they gave me a medical report to give to the school. I read some worrying things in the report—I didn’t know that there had been nerve damage in the left arm. The doctors are supposed to begin with treatment of the skin first, then set the bones and then begin measuring the neurological responses to understand the scope of the damage better. God help us.”¹⁹

Abanub Nashaat Sarid suffered serious injuries as well: “I was in front of the diocese office getting ready to go home to attend the midnight breakfast when suddenly I heard gunfire. I was hit with a bullet in the back, which traveled to my diaphragm and pierced it. I fell on my face, and an ambulance took me first to the Naga Hammadi General Hospital and from there, to the Sohag Hospital due to the poor condition I was

¹⁸ EIPR telephone interview with Shenouda Munir Shuhdi, 17 Jan. 2010.

¹⁹ EIPR telephone interview with the mother of Kyrillos Wagih, 17 Jan. 2010.

in and the possibility that the bullet had injured my spleen, since the bleeding didn't stop until I reached the Sohag Hospital. There I had surgery to remove the bullet from my abdominal cavity. The doctors have not yet told me how long I need to stay in the hospital."²⁰

The EIPR fact-finding mission met with several relatives of those killed in the violence, among them Sameh Salah, who lost his friend and brother-in-law Rafiq Rifaat, which clearly affected him. Sameh was on his way to the Mar Yuhanna Church on Christmas Eve with Rafiq. They parted ways at the church gate for a few minutes as Sameh went to greet his friends; Rafiq was hit by six bullets and died. Sameh, like other Copts in Naga Hammadi, consistently used the term 'martyr' to refer to the victims of the crime: "We all envy the martyrs—they're free of the degradation we live with. The Lord knows every drop of blood that was spilled, and that blood was not shed in vain. Those who died were chosen by the Lord because they are his children. He took them before the bullets did. The Lord gave them peace from the degradation we live with here. They're freed from the abuse and are at peace. The bullet chose the best among us—no, not the bullet, but the Lord himself chose Rafiq. He wanted to give him peace from the crap we see and took him away."²¹

Kyrillos Zakaria, who lost his brother Ayman and two of his friends on Christmas Eve, said, "The day of the incident I was in Bahgoura. Our Father [Kyrillos] warned us of the possibility of something bad happening to Copts during the holiday. He said he had told the security authorities, who told him to exercise caution and end the mass quickly. I left Bahgoura and met my brother Ayman, and we went to the church on March 30th St. Ayman went inside and I stayed with my friends Bula Atef and Abanub Kamal in front of the Lukas Company on the main street. While we were talking, I saw Hamam al-Kamouni driving a car and coming toward us. Suddenly, al-Kamouni opened fire on us using a strange automatic weapon. Abanub and Bula were hit, and I took cover behind a parked car. Al-Kamouni was driving the car with one hand and holding the weapon with the other. He wasn't scared at all and was moving easily, shooting at everyone next to or in front of the church. A few minutes later Romani Milad, my brother's friend, came to tell me that Ayman had been shot in front of the church about 50 meters from where I was. I went there to find him unconscious. Friends told me that he had only been hit in the arm and had fainted from the shock and loss of blood. I didn't know that the bullet went from his arm to his chest. We put him on a motorcycle and headed for the hospital where I saw the other victims bleeding to death, since there were no facilities at all. In the reception and emergency room, eight doctors were taking turns using one stethoscope. There was no defibrillator to save some of the martyrs and no blood bags at the hospital. A while later, I learned that my brother had died. They told us to wait for the medical

²⁰ EIPR telephone interview with Abanub Nashaat, 17 Jan. 2010.

²¹ EIPR interview with Sameh Salah, 13 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

examiner, who reached the hospital from Qena at 10:30 the next morning—13 hours later, even though it's only 45 minutes by car from Qena to Naga Hammadi."²²

Another witness gave a similar statement: "On Wednesday, everything was calm and normal, but there was no adequate security presence for the holiday evening given the charged atmosphere since the Farshout events. Only four or five policemen were there—fewer than the number in previous years. The worshippers noticed that most executive leaders and officials were not at the service as they usually were. Security and executive leaders did not attend, and there were just a few representatives who came to greet the bishop for a few minutes then left. The mass at the Mar Yuhanna al-Habibi Church, which Father Kyrillos leads, was over at 10:30 sharp. Sometime between 11:15 and 11:30 that night we heard gunfire and looked outside, where we found Bishoi Farahat and two of his friends about 50 meters away on the ground next to the diocese building. We then found others in front of the al-Ahmadi shop on March 30th St. There was no security in the street. The ambulance came about 15 minutes later, followed by an armored vehicle that stopped on the street."²³

EIPR researchers heard the same statement regarding the weak security presence from another witness who attended the mass at Mar Yuhanna: "Security on the holiday eve was less than normal. Usually security forces step up their presence during the Christmas mass and the first day of the holiday to protect Christians, particularly since young men sometimes wait outside churches to harass girls or others leaving the service. We heard that Father Kyrillos was scared and that he had warned priests to leave the church early—no later than 10 pm—unlike previous holidays. There were no security trucks next to churches, just a few regular security guards."²⁴

Significantly, the statements of all eyewitnesses who were present at the scene of gunfire on Christmas Eve remarked on the weak security presence in front of churches on Christmas Eve, in an area where sectarian tensions were running high and threats had been made against Copts. Nevertheless, the Deputy Interior Minister for General Security, General Adli Fayed, rejected all insinuations of any failure to secure churches when he met with a parliamentary delegation in Naga Hammadi on 14 January 2010, stating that "houses of worship had been secured while Copts celebrated Christmas, not only in Naga Hammadi, but in all the republic's governorates and cities. It is standard procedure to reinforce guard services to all houses of worship during Islamic and Coptic holidays."²⁵ To support his statement regarding the heavy security guard, the deputy minister noted that the incident took place in the street far from any houses of worship.

²² EIPR interview with Kyrillos Zakaria, 13 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

²³ EIPR interview with an eyewitness who requested anonymity, 12 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

²⁴ EIPR interview with an eyewitness who requested anonymity, 12 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

²⁵ Amir al-Sarraf and Ashraf Shantir, "'Adli Fayed fi liqa'ih bi-a'da' lajnatay al-amn al-qawmi wa huquq al-insan bi-Naj' Hammadi," *al-Wafd*, 16 Jan. 2010.

But all the witness statements and the survey carried out by EIPR researchers of the crime scenes clearly indicate that the shootings at all three locales took place only meters from two churches and a monastery. The security presence in front of these churches on Christmas Eve did not in any way reflect the “reinforcement” referred to by the deputy minister. Pakinam Amer, the journalist for the English edition of *al-Masry al-Youm* quoted earlier and who was present at the Christmas mass in the Mar Yuhanna Church in Naga Hammadi, stated that only two police cars were present, each carrying five individuals. She reported that the two cars then left the scene one hour after the mass began at 6 pm. Her report added that at the time of the attacks, only one police major and three soldiers were next to the church.²⁶

Thus the answer to the question—could the Naga Hammadi attacks have been prevented?—is necessarily dependent on the answer to the question of the previous chapter: could or should the Naga Hammadi attacks have been anticipated? Both questions will remain without an adequate response until an independent, comprehensive investigation is opened into the circumstances leading to the Christmas Eve crime.

Chapter 4: The Day of the Funeral, Copts Use Violence

Events on the day after the attacks, 7 January, played a pivotal role in escalating the tensions and violence in Naga Hammadi and surrounding villages over the next two days between Muslims, Copts and security forces.

The morning after the attacks, the official Christmas holiday, many Copts from the city and neighboring villages gathered in front of the Naga Hammadi General Hospital after learning of the attacks the night before and the number of dead and wounded. As time passed, the crowd grew to some 2,000 people, according to press reports and the estimates of most eyewitnesses interviewed by the EIPR. Those assembled began to grow angrier, perhaps moved by the sense of injury experienced at seeing the bodies of the deceased lying on the hospital floor, the initial objections voiced by the authorities to conducting autopsies of the dead, and subsequent delays in turning over the bodies of the deceased while waiting for the medical examiner. Many of the witnesses and the victims’ relatives described provocative and improper treatment they suffered at the hands of the hospital staff and administration and security personnel, all of which added to the shock and grief everyone felt at the events of the previous night.

As the number of Copts—and their anger—grew outside the hospital, security officials decided to move the bodies of the deceased in police cars to the church for funeral services, without allowing the victims’ relatives to carry their loved ones in a funeral procession. This proposal stoked the crowd’s anger and sparked protest, at which point they began throwing stones at the facade of the hospital, ambulances, police and

²⁶ Pakinam Amer, “Bloody Xmas: The Aftermath,” *al-Masry al-Youm*, 8 Jan. 2010.

cars parked in front while chanting religious slogans, condemning the governor of Qena and accusing him of weakness, and decrying the State Security police. As the crowd grew, security began to use force. Soldiers fired tear gas and then rubber bullets randomly at the crowd, which injured at least seven people according to witness estimates, among them one person who may lose an eye as a result.

After negotiations with the security forces, the assembled Copts were able to carry the bodies of the deceased in a funeral procession to the church. The procession was marred by scuffles with Muslims who threw stones at the procession and women who ululated from their balconies. Some Copts in the procession threw stones at Muslims in response, vandalizing some shops and cars on the way.

One witness to the protests the day of the funeral procession, a resident of Bahgoura, gave a detailed statement to the EIPR fact-finding mission about the events of the day: "On Thursday morning, thousands of residents of Naga Hammadi and Bahgoura gathered in front of the Naga Hammadi General Hospital, located about 2 km from Bahgoura. The hospital administration and security personnel provoked the already upset people. Bodies were lying on the ground and this prompted a flood of anger. Initially they had refused to conduct autopsies, but they later agreed after the doctors told them it was necessary to pursue the investigation and find the perpetrators. The people gathered and chanted religious slogans like 'With spirit and blood, we will redeem you, O cross,' and some political slogans, including 'Down with the governor' and 'Down with State Security.' Some people also insulted security officials. Events developed and angry young men broke the front hospital window, vandalized an ambulance and a medical examiner's vehicle, and pushed a police car into the canal next to the hospital. The police responded with violence and began firing tear gas and shooting rubber bullets, as well as beating the assembled with clubs. This injured six people, one of whom sustained a serious eye injury and another an arm injury.

"The residents carried the deceased from the hospital to the Mar Yuhanna Church, all the while repeating religious slogans. In the meantime, some youth vandalized electricity poles, public telephones and trees, and some Muslims in their homes began to ululate from their balconies and throw bricks and stones at the funeral procession.

"After the prayers for the deceased inside the church, Father Kyrillos and Father Baiman told the residents not to assemble, chant any hostile slogans or assault anyone or anything in order to protect them. Christian clerics and the security apparatus agreed to take the bodies in three cars for burial at a cemetery run by the diocese; only first-degree relatives were allowed to accompany the bodies.

On the way back from the funeral, Christian youths from Bahgoura—about 500 of them—tore up some trees on Port Said St. and insulted the governor, the director of security and [MP] Abd al-Rahim al-Ghoul. A Muslim citizen, the owner of a car dealership next to the Naga Hammadi Fever Hospital, fired some shots in the air from an automatic rifle, dispersing the youths. They continued on their way to Bahgoura,

but a car carrying Muslim youths caught up with them and began throwing bricks and rocks at the Christians."²⁷

The father of the late Abanub Kamal Nashed told the EIPR fact-finding mission, "We heard shots at around 11:30 pm. A Christian contacted Bishoi, Abanub's brother, and told him that his brother had been shot next to the diocese headquarters. He went and found his brother drowning in blood in front of the diocese. We called emergency police and an ambulance then we took him to the hospital but by the time we got there, he had already died. In the morning we found the bodies thrown on the [hospital] floor without any regard. People rejected the idea of autopsies at first, then they accepted it, but the victims' families were subjected to many provocations. Later those in the funeral procession had bricks thrown at them, then people were held in the church and were not allowed to go bury the bodies."²⁸

Similarly, Kyrillos, the brother of victim Ayman Zakaria, said, "The medical examiner arrived and asked to start the autopsies before a burial permit had been issued. The police insisted on moving the bodies in armored cars, so we demonstrated inside the hospital and the morgue. The security response was violent, and we were shocked by a flood of rubber bullets and tear gas, and soldiers beat us inside the hospital. Some of the youths broke the glass front of the hospital in protest at the humiliations we experienced."²⁹

Another witness who was present for the shooting and later went to the hospital gave a similar statement: "The people went to the hospital starting that night, and people kept coming for the funeral procession until the crowd reached a few thousand. The families refused autopsies for the bodies and security began kicking them out of the hospital. They refused to move and chanted slogans against the security apparatus and the government, calling for the downfall of the Minister of Interior, the director of security and the governor. Security forces fired rubber bullets and tear gas at them, prompting clashes with the families [of the victims]. The hospital front window was broken, and an ambulance, medical examiner's vehicle and a police car were vandalized. The funeral procession set out from the hospital on foot toward the church—a distance of 3 km—and reached the church at about noon. There were excesses committed by some Christian youths who vandalized public phones, electrical poles and some shops and neon signs on Port Said St. They also chanted religious slogans liked 'With spirit and blood, we will redeem you, O cross,' and other slogans like 'Down with the governor' and 'Down with the director of security.' At that point, some Muslims started throwing bricks at the funeral procession and ululating. Father

²⁷ EIPR interview with an eyewitness who requested anonymity, 12 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

²⁸ EIPR interview with Kamal Nashed, 12 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

²⁹ EIPR interview with Kyrillos Zakaria, 13 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

Kyrillos ordered the young men to stay in the church and not follow the procession to the cemetery, which was limited to first-degree relatives.”³⁰

The EIPR fact-finding mission met with Adel, who was injured by a rubber bullet fired by the security forces to disperse the Coptic protestors in front of the church. “On Wednesday, I didn’t go to the church. I was in the street when I received a call from my father telling me that Christians were being shot in the streets of Naga Hammadi,” Adel said. “In the morning I went to the hospital to take part in the funeral procession and found a great many security forces closing the road. We entered through a bypass road and found that the bodies of the deceased had been lying on the ground since the ambulance removed them from the scene of the shooting, which shows that they didn’t try to save anyone. Then the provocative treatment started by security forces, which were trying to corral people in. Angry Christian youths broke the front window of the hospital and wrecked an ambulance, a medical examiner’s vehicle and a police car. At noon security started beating people and shooting tear gas and rubber bullets that they aimed at people’s faces. I was waiting at the hospital door and was hit with a rubber bullet. My face started bleeding and I couldn’t see a thing. I needed someone to carry me outside or treat me, but it didn’t happen. I waited for half an hour until one of my friends came and got me out of the crowd. At about 1 pm, I went to the Horus Hospital in Naga Hammadi, where they cleaned up the blood and hooked me up to a glucose IV drip. I stayed there four hours. On Friday, I went to a doctor in Qena who told me that there were hematomas and bullet fragments in my left eye. I went to a hospital in Cairo after that, where they conducted a CT scan and wrote me a prescription to reduce the infection. They told me to wait 15 days before undergoing any surgery because of the infection. I didn’t think about filing a police report about the injury,” he continued.³¹

Coptic activist and blogger Hala El Masry recorded the events the day of the funeral procession on her blog, saying, “They to break up the human mass of people who had assembled for the martyrs’ procession. They tried to delay the burial or put the martyrs’ bodies in ambulances and bury them quietly. But the crowd insisted on carrying the martyrs’ bodies on their shoulders, and they got what they wanted. They chanted slogans, mostly ‘With spirit and blood, we will redeem you, O cross.’ The angry young people and families walked in a procession that shook the ground as it carried their grief to God, who heard the cries of Abel’s blood rising from the earth. We all entered the church to pray over our martyrs. I saw the director of security go up to the bishop during the prayers and he seemed to say something to him. After the prayers, the news came for no one to leave the church because the streets weren’t safe. Angry Muslims—angry about what, I don’t know—were up in arms in the Sahel area, which is the same area where MP al-Ghoul and his right arm, al-Kamouni, come from. Father Kyrillos finished the prayers. Father Baiman, the bishop of Nagada, and several

³⁰ EIPR interview with an eyewitness who requested anonymity, 12 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

³¹ EIPR interview with Adel, 12 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

other priests were with him, and they all grieved for their martyred children. No one left the church. The director of security and lots of other security leaders came to explain the danger of us carrying our martyrs to the diocese's cemetery for burial or even if we left the church at that moment. Then all the mobile phones started ringing carrying the news of the attack on Bahgoura."³²

Chapter 5: Collective Attacks on Copts in Naga Hammadi, Bahgoura and Izbet Tarkas

From Thursday afternoon, 7 January, while the funeral procession was underway for those killed on Christmas Eve, until dawn on Saturday, 9 January, a wave of sectarian attacks erupted, striking the homes and property of Copts in Naga Hammadi, Bahgoura and Izbet Tarkas. Groups carrying knives, clubs and canisters of gasoline broke down the doors of shops and looted and torched them; in the areas of al-Sahel and al-Suq in Naga Hammadi, they attempted to break down the doors of homes and attack the inhabitants.

All the statements collected by the EIPR fact-finding mission agreed on the failure of the security apparatus to protect Copts and stop the vandalizing of their property. There was little security in the areas and streets where feelings were running high and likely to explode at any moment. The EIPR fact-finding mission inspected the affected areas and noted signs of destruction and vandalism in shops and homes, as well as a general state of terror among the local Coptic residents, who feared more attacks.

Gamil, the owner of a grocery in Naga Hammadi, told EIPR researchers how his shop was destroyed during the funeral procession and the prayer service in the Mar Yuhanna Church. He received calls from his neighbors at 3 pm on Thursday, 7 January, telling him that groups of Muslims were breaking into homes and looting and vandalizing shops on several streets in Naga Hammadi, among them al-Nasara St. behind the Fever Hospital and al-Tahrir St., where his shop is located. Gamil added that the crowd was being led by his Muslim neighbors from the same street. They broke the lock on his shop and the main window and looted the contents of the store.

At the same time, a group of Muslims from Izbet Tarkas, located in the village of Bahgoura, set fire to a house and a photo studio and broke the window of a pharmacy. A Christian citizen from Izbet Tarkas told EIPR researchers, "On Thursday at about 2 pm, a group of Muslims numbering more than 100 took to the streets of Izbet Tarkas and started breaking down the doors of Christian homes. They set fire to the home of Zakaria Zaki and a studio owned by Michael Fayez, and they broke the front window at Sami's Pharmacy. They threw Molotov cocktails at some homes and torched a motorcycle, then they wrecked Wael Fayez's car. They kept saying, 'There is no god but God' and defaming Christians. That continued until about 4:30 pm, when the

³² Hala El Masry, "Ayadi al-ijram al-khafiya fi majzarat al-milad."

police arrived—two and a half hours after the attacks began—and took control of the situation. Local residents then stayed in their homes.”³³

The situation was calmed slightly on Thursday evening and Friday morning, 8 January, when the Public Prosecutor visited Naga Hammadi and stated that the perpetrators would be dealt with severely and subjected to punishment. The situation changed as soon as officials left the city. At about 6 pm, groups of Muslims from the al-Suq area of Naga Hammadi took to the streets carrying swords, iron bars and knives, and they began looting and destroying homes and property without intervention by the security apparatus, according to testimonies collected by the fact-finding mission.

One Muslim eyewitness from the al-Suq area said that the attacks started on Thursday but were more severe on Friday. He added, “About 300 people were walking in the streets of al-Suq and al-Sahel areas, breaking glass and looting shops. They were also breaking down the doors of homes. All this happened meanwhile security trucks were placed only around the police station and at the entrances to the town. There was no security presence in the riot areas in al-Suq and al-Sahel.”³⁴

Girgis Tawdrus, 62, the owner of a grocery store in the al-Suq area of Naga Hammadi, told the EIPR mission in a statement, “I live about two streets over from my shop in the al-Suq area. At about 7 pm on Thursday evening, I learned from neighbors that some thugs had attacked the shop and tried to break down the door, but failed. When I asked the neighbors, I learned that it was a group of Muslim youths who were shouting, ‘God is great,’ and trying to break the shop door with homemade swords. The next day at about 6 pm, there was a curfew imposed on the city, but still 300 to 400 Muslims armed with knives, axes, homemade swords and clubs attacked my shop and broke down the door. Some of them entered the shop and stole goods worth LE10,000, including LE800 in cash, as well as telephone cards worth LE1,000 that I had bought to sell during the holiday.

“My son was nearby and saw the store being looted, but we couldn’t leave the house, neither one of us. The attackers had all manner of knives. Some were wearing masks and others had painted their faces black so we couldn’t identify them. They moved in an organized fashion as if they had planned it in advance. After looting the shop, they took out wads of material soaked in gasoline and threw them in the shop. It went up in flames and I lost the trade I’ve working in for 15 years. Attempts by Muslim neighbors to intervene or put out the fire did no good, and the fire blazed for about an hour before firefighters and the chief of police arrived, and we filed a police report. On Saturday, a committee from the city council came to appraise the damage, and they promised to compensate me.”³⁵

³³ EIPR interview with an eyewitness who requested anonymity, 12 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

³⁴ EIPR interview with an eyewitness who requested anonymity, 12 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

³⁵ EIPR interview with Girgis Tawdrus, 12 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

In a similar statement, Talaat Fakhouri, the owner of a cloth shop in the al-Suq area, said, "I opened a cloth shop in the al-Suq area about six years ago. On Friday, the neighbors called to tell me that a large group of Muslim youths carrying homemade swords and Molotov cocktails were attacking my shop, but I couldn't go out because of the curfew imposed by the security forces. I followed the situation with the neighbors by cell phone and learned that they burned the whole shop down after they stole the material. One of my neighbors tried to intervene to stop the fire and the armed youths attacked him. The locals recognized some of the assailants although their faces were disguised. They were from the hamlets around Naga Hammadi, and everyone knew that they were headed to Bahgoura to burn the homes of Christians, but security forces let them in to the al-Suq area. Even though there were two armored vehicles and Central Security trucks at the entrance to the area, the soldiers didn't move. They didn't even fire one shot in the air to disperse the dozens of armed men who torched my shop and looted it for two full hours."³⁶

Yasser Ahmed, known as Yasser al-Sunni, is a resident of the area who tried to stop the attacks on the property of his Christian neighbor. He told EIPR researchers, "On Friday, I found dozens of armed men trying to break into the paint and carpentry shop of Uncle Shenouda Karas. They used an axe to break down the door and then stole everything in the shop except some heavy cans they couldn't take with them. Then they threw Molotov cocktails in the shop to torch it. I ran to Shenouda's shop and tried, along with other local residents, to put out the fire in what was left of the shop. I knew that the canisters that were left had flammable paint thinner in them, not to mention the gas canister that might explode at any moment. The armed men were screaming, 'The Christians torched the mosque,' and then kept repeating, 'God is great' while they looted the shop. Then they burned it down and left looking for another place. Strangely, the whole thing lasted nearly 90 minutes and we saw no trace of any security personnel. The fire truck arrived three hours later. We learned later that the police had used the fire truck to disperse Christian demonstrators in front of the diocese headquarters instead of putting out the fires that broke out all over the al-Suq area and nearly took the lives of all its inhabitants, both Muslims and Christians."³⁷

Witnesses met by the EIPR fact-finding mission said that the security forces were not heavily deployed in Naga Hammadi until Saturday evening and had left local Christians "at the mercy of thugs" until that time. For three straight nights, most Copts remained in their homes in fear of being assaulted or killed. Several Copts said that sick people were unable to leave their homes to go to the doctor or hospital during this period. Most Christians relied on whatever food happened to be in the house.

In the Christian-majority village of Bahgoura, the violence and destruction was even more severe. The village was cloaked in black, and the signs of grief and depression

³⁶ EIPR interview with Talaat Fakhouri, 12 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

³⁷ EIPR interview with Yasser Ahmed, 12 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

were clear on the faces of the few individuals seen in the street, particularly in those areas where Christians are the majority. There was a heavy security presence, especially in areas that had been the site of fires. Security police dispatches were deployed at close intervals, and it was difficult to walk even 50 meters without running across two police cars, in addition to other security cars sweeping the streets to monitor the situation and prevent “strangers” from entering the village. EIPR researchers began their tour from Abu Asal St., where they found the rubble of several destroyed houses that were blackened by the fires. The fear of most local residents was so great that they refused to talk; a few were busy clearing the remnants of the attacks. After surveying the Abu Asal area, EIPR researchers entered the al-Dar area and from there, Izbet Tarkas, where they found burned shops and closed homes, and the residents scared to open them to strangers. On the way back, they noted that about three officers stood guard at each of the four churches in the village.

Of the few local Copts who agreed to give a statement, one resident of a street near the Abu Asal area of Bahgoura who witnessed the events said, “There were about 3,000 Muslims moving in one group with iron chains, bricks, rocks, fire bombs and gas canisters. In the beginning, they tried to enter the al-Baraka area of Bahgoura between the Church of the Virgin and the Mar Girgis Church, but they were unable to enter this strongly Christian area, so they went back to Izbet Tarkas where they broke into Adel’s furniture shop, robbed and torched it. They looted and burned Latif’s supermarket, looted a satellite shop and burned down Morris’s shop at the beginning of al-Tahouna St. Oddly, the electricity went out right at the same time in the neighborhood and security forces disappeared completely on Friday, even though the day before there had been some tense hours and the police had come to maintain order. The assailants then went to Tiraat al-Wazira St. and the Abu Asal area, where they broke into Atallah’s house and burned it down. Then they broke into Rushdi’s house and set fire to it and a motorcycle. They also torched Sadros’s grocery, Adel Alfi’s house and the home of Ayed Girgis Habib, below which was a shop, a large supermarket and three warehouses. A carpentry shop was burned down, along with the co-op, Edward Nimr’s store and a supermarket owned by Edward Faragallah. They burned down Hamdi Wissa’s house and the carpentry shop he owns, and also the homes of Malak Sameh and Wagih Nasri, then they entered al-Magarin St., where they wrecked Michel Duss’s car. Some Christians saw the vandals and photographed them, but people were too afraid to respond. There were some Muslims, too, who defended Christians and weren’t happy with the situation, like Farghali’s family.”³⁸

Another witness from Bahgoura said that there was no security in the village at all during the events, which lasted from 7 until 11 pm on 8 January: “Security forces were at the entrance to the village. They didn’t engage with anyone or try to stop the attacks.

³⁸ EIPR interview with an eyewitness who requested anonymity, 12 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

The firefighters came at about 10:30 pm, after the fire had already taken everything. Only two trucks came to put out fires in dozens of houses and shops.”³⁹

Another eyewitness, a resident of Bahgoura, told the EIPR fact-finding mission, “Christians found hundreds of Muslims carrying clubs, cleavers and knives, along with cans of gasoline, attacking their homes. We all closed our doors fearing we’d be killed, particularly after it became clear that what happened in Naga Hammadi might be repeated. Shops were broken into and homes burned all along Abu Asal St. The Muslims targeted at least four houses with their Christian inhabitants inside, throwing firebombs at them and trying to burn them down.”⁴⁰

Journalist Nader Shukri gave the following testimony about the attacks in Bahgoura: “On Friday evening I was in Naga Hammadi when I heard that violence had started in Bahgoura. People from the village called me and told me that houses were on fire and that the Virgin had appeared there. I heard ululation and screams on the telephone. I reached Bahgoura at 9 pm on Friday, 8 January, with a photographer colleague. At the entrance to the village, we immediately felt we couldn’t breathe and our eyes began to water from the tear gas that filled the village. State Security officers in civilian clothes were standing outside the village holding automatic weapons. They told us, ‘The situation is inflamed and you can’t enter the village. All we’re doing is trying to stop people from outside enter the village so that things don’t get worse.’ Security forces began lining up outside the village and repeating enthusiastic cries to make people feel there was security. When I managed to enter the village, I found fires burning in two houses and four shops. Some people were screaming and others were ululating because the Virgin had appeared in the village skies. A third group was trying to put out the fires while the rest of the village Copts stayed in their homes in fear. The scene was strange and terrifying and filled with contradictions.”⁴¹

At the same time as the attacks in Bahgoura, similar acts of looting and arson were taking place in Izbat Tarkas for the second night in a row. The EIPR also received information that on Friday evening, 8 January, Copts in the village of al-Rahmaniya—a village adjacent to Bahgoura where three of the victims of the Christmas Eve attacks lived—clashed with security forces, who used water cannons and rubber bullets, injuring several Copts. The EIPR fact-finding mission was not able to enter al-Rahmaniya because of the security cordon and closure of the village.

According to statements collected by the EIPR mission, several rumors making the rounds on Friday contributed significantly to sparking the violence. On Friday, there was a funeral procession for the Muslim policeman who was killed in the 6 January attacks, but a rumor quickly spread that the funeral was for a Muslim who was killed

³⁹ EIPR interview with an eyewitness who requested anonymity, 12 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

⁴⁰ EIPR interview with an eyewitness who requested anonymity, 12 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

⁴¹ EIPR interview with Nader Shukri, 11 Jan. 2010, Cairo.

by Copts as retribution. Another popular rumor was that Copts had burned down a mosque; this rumor began on Coptic Christmas Day and spread quickly among local residents. Another unfounded rumor claimed that two Muslims were shot and killed by armed Christians. The EIPR believes that any comprehensive investigation into the events in Naga Hammadi must attempt to ascertain the source of these rumors and those responsible for them.

The EIPR fact-finding mission learned that an elderly Christian woman, reportedly named Alice Qastangi, died in Bahgoura on Friday evening, 8 January, during the violence. Stories differ as to the cause of death, with some saying that she choked to death from the tear gas and others saying that the death was caused by the state of panic at the collective violence against village Copts. The EIPR asks the Public Prosecutor to issue a clarification about the woman's death. Her funeral procession took place on Saturday afternoon, 9 January, amid a heavy security presence, according to some who attended the funeral.

On Saturday morning, 9 January, security reinforcements arrived from the governorates adjacent to Qena and calm was restored to the area. The Public Prosecutor has thus far issued no report about the indictment of any suspects on charges of involvement in the criminal assaults that took place from 7 to 9 January.

Umm Ahmed: A story that must be told

Umm Ahmed is a woman from Upper Egypt who decided to stand up against the thugs, even if she had to do it alone. She is a short woman, over 75 years old. A widow, she has long protected her children and grandchildren with a practiced eye that can be described as both maternal and paternal. Umm Ahmed, or the Hagga as everyone calls her in the al-Suq area of Naga Hammadi, had an appointment with "the young thugs" as she called them on Friday night, 8 January. "There were 300 kids, all of them either with their faces covered or all painted black," she said, "kids the same age as my kids carrying knives and cleavers and swords came out to break into George's shop. The shop was closed. I yelled at them, 'Shame on you, that's a Muslim's shop,' so they would leave, and they threw bricks at me until they broke the whole window."

Umm Ahmed did not fall silent when the "kids" attacked her. She was determined to stop what was happening below her house in any way possible. She went out to them on her balcony and screamed, "You there, boy, and you, get back! I tell you that's a Muslim shop, you unbelievers." But the kids responded with more rocks and bricks. "I didn't shut up. I went to the broken window and yelled at them, 'Shame, boy! I'm calling the police.' And I screamed at them to go away. Then they grabbed wads of cloth wet with gasoline, lit them and threw them at us in the house."

The elderly woman screamed as she saw balls of fire take hold of furniture that was part of her daughter's dowry. She tried to put out what she could and yelled for her daughter to put out the rest before the fire reached the gas canisters in the apartment.

Umm Ahmed noticed the sound of her son, Ahmed, running up the stairs, coming from the funeral of Ayman the policeman. She yelled at him, "They've torched the store of Uncle George, Ahmed, they burned and looted it, son." Ahmed went outside to see the shop and suddenly found his elderly mother coming towards him with a pot of water. "I thought I'd put out the fire," she said. "One day God will show them, those who did that and burned down the shop of that good man. George has been with us 15 years and we've never seen anything bad from him. Why would they do that to him?"

In just a few minutes, everyone was helping Umm Ahmed put out the fire in what remained of George's grocery, some with water, others with dirt, but in the end, the fire was stronger than Umm Ahmed. Nothing was left of George's shop but a small cabinet in which Umm Ahmed put the remnants from the fire. She then went inside her house to think of how times had changed and about the "kids" who could not be stopped by a look that had once "stopped men with mustaches in their tracks."

Chapter 6: Security Abuses Following the Naga Hammadi Attacks

After the security apparatus failed to anticipate the attacks in Naga Hammadi, confront the assailants during the attacks, and protect Copts' homes and property from looting, arson and destruction, it aggravated the situation further by engaging in the customary pattern of abuses and violations that follow every act of sectarian violence: individual and collective arbitrary arrests of people from both sides, the use of Emergency Law, the torture and ill-treatment of detainees, and restrictions on the freedom of journalists and civil society activists.

1. Arbitrary arrests

The EIPR obtained several statements that reported random arrests and detention by security forces at various times from the morning of 7 January until dawn on 10 January. Both Muslims and Christians were arrested, most of them in places and at times far from the acts of violence and attacks, during which the security forces failed to do their duty of stopping the attacks and arresting those involved.

While the deputy minister for general security, General Adli Fayed, said that 16 Muslims and 13 Copts were arrested for rioting,⁴² a church source in Naga Hammadi told the EIPR fact-finding mission that "48 Copts were arrested during the first four days of the events; 28 of them were released in three groups while 20 are still detained, some of them brothers. The arrests were arbitrarily carried out after the events and clashes. Several were arrested in their homes—one was even arrested when he went to ask about his brother who was detained at the police station. Others were arrested

⁴² Amir al-Sarraf and Ashraf Shantir. *Supra* note 25.

riding public transport. We've learned that the detainees were treated harshly and subjected to humiliations, curses and beatings."⁴³

Journalist Nader Shukri was a witness to one of these arrests. He said in a statement to the EIPR, "At 6 pm on Friday, 8 January, about 300 youths gathered in front of the diocese building and chanted angry slogans to protest the Christmas Eve assassinations and subsequent violence against Copts. The bishop, the director of security and State Security officers came out and tried to disperse and calm them down. Several were from the village of Bahgoura, which had experienced attacks on Thursday night. Security forces surrounded the protestors from both sides and then allowed about 250 young men out. Then, all of a sudden, they closed in on the protestors and began beating and dragging the 50 remaining ones to police trucks in front of the priests and the bishop. The priests tried to rescue some of them, but security cursed and upbraided the priests."⁴⁴

Nader Shukri's statement is consistent with a statement given to EIPR researchers by another witness to the same event: "I went to the demonstrations the day after the incident in front of the diocese to protest the police's detention of Coptic youths from Bahgoura. I was violently beaten at that demonstration. Some of the protestors were children no older than 15. Security forces arrested one of them and he screamed at a priest, 'Help me, Father!' But several policemen and detectives prevented the priests from intervening and even hit them in front of the diocese trustee, who was himself pushed to the ground trying to protect a child from the violence of the security forces. I heard one officer scream in the trustee's face, 'You shut up, you piece of dirt, I don't want to hear your mother's voice. If you open your mouth I'll drag you to jail by your beard. We've got the situation under control and anyone who opens his mouth is going to jail.'"⁴⁵

One Copt from the village of Bahgoura said that at dawn on Saturday, 9 January, security forces arrested 30 Christians from Bahgoura and 14 Muslims and that none of the arrests targeted those involved in the violence in the village on Friday night. He added that six minors were released a few days later.

A written statement submitted by political activist Bula Abduh, a member of the Democratic Front Party and a resident of Naga Hammadi, said that at dawn on Sunday, 10 January, the city saw "a broad arrest campaign targeting Christian youths at around 4 am...in addition to those arrested during the demonstrations and sit-ins."⁴⁶

⁴³ EIPR interview with a priest from the Naga Hammadi diocese who requested anonymity, 13 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

⁴⁴ EIPR interview with Nader Shukri, 11 Jan. 2010, Cairo.

⁴⁵ EIPR interview with an eyewitness who requested anonymity, 13 Jan. 2010, Naga Hammadi, Qena.

⁴⁶ Bula Abduh, a report on Naga Hammadi, written statement.

The EIPR fact-finding mission was told by various sources, both Muslims and Christians in Naga Hammadi, that security forces arrested Copts in their homes who had published reports or photos on the internet about events in Naga Hammadi or Bahgoura, but the mission could neither confirm nor deny this information.

The EIPR obtained a list of 12 Coptic youths ordered detained by the prosecutor's office pending an investigation into the four-day rioting. On 17 January, they were transferred to the New Valley Prison. They are: Wael Milad Samuel, Fadi Milad Samuel, George Nasri Sidqi, Yuhanna Masoud Atallah, Mina Buqtur Kyrillos, Raziqi Romani Gadallah, Emad Unsi Mufid, Milad Badia Risala, Mamdouh Fawzi Nasri, Raafat Rifaat Adli, Hani Nabil Ibrahim and Hani Zahir Ibrahim.

Eight other Copts were still detained by the police in undisclosed locations at the time this report was issued: Osama Wadia, Bishoi Maher Zikri, Wina Maher Zikri, Nashaat Maher Zikri, Milad Nageh Marko, Mamdouh Azmi, Raziqi William Fouad and Mina Victor.

At the time this report was issued, no list had been released containing the number or names of Muslims detained in connection with the events. The EIPR urges the Public Prosecutor to issue a detailed statement containing the number of name of all those detained pending an investigation into the violence, as well as the charges against them; it asks the Public Prosecutor to conduct an investigation into any illegal detention in connection with these events and hold accountable all those responsible for illegal detentions.

2. Torture and ill-treatment

The EIPR has obtained several statements alleging that at least some Coptic detainees were tortured and ill-treated at the State Security police headquarters in Naga Hammadi. This included beating, kicking, forcing detainees to partially or wholly disrobe, blindfolding, and religious slurs and curses. Several pieces of evidence indicate that one State Security police officer administered electric shocks to some detainees on sensitive parts of their bodies, including their genitals.

The EIPR received a detailed statement from one detainee after his release regarding the conditions of his detention and his torture: "I was on a visit and I saw a crowd behind the Naga Hammadi diocese building demonstrating against the attacks in the city. I didn't take part in the demonstration but I just passed by the street to see what was happening. I was arrested and thrown in a police car with 14 Christians. That was between 5 and 6 pm on Friday, 8 January. The car went to the Naga Hammadi police station where we sat in a room with office desks. Officials at the station set aside two rooms for Christians and one for Muslims because there were fewer of them. A policeman told us, 'You'll be the ones to bear the responsibility of this mess.' A while later we learned that he meant the vandalism and the waste of public funds. No one at the station questioned us and we didn't sign any papers. We were just detained

without charge in the offices of the Naga Hammadi police station until Saturday morning.

“On Saturday, 9 January, at about noon, a truck came and took ten of us Christians to State Security headquarters. As soon as we arrived, they blindfolded us and put us in a room with detectives, soldiers and officers who beat the detainees on their faces and kicked them. Then they called each person by name to go into another room. I heard the detainees screaming from the pain and they said other things that indicated harsh treatment, like ‘Shame on you, please, pasha.’ I also heard intermittent electric sparks and, of course, religious slurs.

“When evening came, they finished questioning us and put us in the police truck, handcuffed and still blindfolded. When we reached the police station, eight of us were taken out and two went back with them. On every shift, they would call out to us to make sure we were still in the room we were detained in.

“When we were in the police station, some of the guys told us about the torture and abuse they faced. One person I knew told me that they had stripped him down to his underwear and that he and others were beaten on their behinds. Electric shocks were given to the penis, testicles and anus. Some people went several times to State Security [headquarters] but others, I among them, went only once. We heard that some people who were with us were transferred to the New Valley prison. Finally, on 12 January I got out with 16 other Christians.”⁴⁷

The EIPR also obtained a statement from the mother of one detainee: “[Our son] suddenly disappeared and we didn’t know what had happened to him. Later we learned from someone who had been released that he was detained at the Naga Hammadi police station. As soon as we heard, his father and I tried to get to the station, but security stopped us and refused to tell us where they were holding our son. Then we heard about the arrest of two of our neighbors’ sons [the EIPR has their names] and we learned that they were detained with our son at the station. I went with my husband to the bishop and we went every day until we learned that security had transferred them from the station to State Security [headquarters] in Qena at the request of Officer Mustafa Gomaa, the director of the State Security Office in the governorate. We learned from others who had been released that the officer was holding the three boys in one room and no one else was allowed in. He was torturing them with the help of police guards, giving them electric shocks to the testicles, penis, nipples and anus. A neighbor who had been released told us that [our son] had severe swelling in his legs as a result of the shocks and burns to various parts of his body. The officer also refused to allow any food into the three boys for the entire time they were in the special torture room.

⁴⁷ EIPR interview with a person who requested anonymity.

“Security has been holding my son for 12 days. Now as far as I know he is at the Naga Hammadi police station. Two days ago they released a young man after severe torture as a result of which he is unable to control his bladder. His family took him to the hospital in Assyout for treatment from the torture. We learned from the diocese that even the blankets sent by our Father [Father Kyrillos] for the detainees were confiscated by the officers and soldiers and were not allowed to reach our children. They are being tortured in isolated groups and Officer Mustafa Gomaa is supervising the torture. Those who have been released have told us about torture by electroshocks, beatings to the behind with a stick, binding of the testicles, sleep and food deprivation, slaps, kicks, the tearing of clothes and religious slurs. Officer Gomaa also threatened to kill those who were released and talked about the torture.”⁴⁸

The EIPR stresses that these are serious allegations, supported by sources at the Naga Hammadi diocese who have received similar reports of the torture of detainees. These allegations require an immediate investigation by the Public Prosecutor, particularly since they indicate that some detainees continue to face torture and ill-treatment at the time this report was issued, which requires urgent intervention.

3. Restrictions on media activities and the freedom to use the internet

While preparing this report, the EIPR received several complaints from journalists covering events in Naga Hammadi who reported various forms of interference with their work, including restrictions on their freedom to conduct interviews with eyewitnesses and clerics, surveillance of their movements, prohibitions on entry to various areas for no clear reason, and harassment of them and local residents who cooperated with them. In some cases, they were completely prevented from doing their job by demands for a special permit. In at least one case, several journalists were physically assaulted.

The EIPR learned that on Friday evening, 8 January, while a demonstration was being organized in front of the Naga Hammadi diocese headquarters, security forces physically assaulted journalists and photographers there to cover the demonstration and forcibly ejected them outside the security cordon surrounding the protest to prevent them from doing their job.

Some reporters complained that they were prohibited from entering Bahgoura, Izbet Tarkas and al-Rahmaniya for several days, particularly 8 and 9 January. Even journalists who tried to visit the scene of the events a week later were prohibited from entering with no legal basis and ordered to obtain a special permit from the public relations office at the Interior Ministry as a condition for continuing their work. One journalist said that the administration at the Sohag General Hospital, which treated

⁴⁸ EIPR interview with a person who requested anonymity.

those wounded in the Christmas Eve attacks, refused to cooperate with her pursuant to directives from security not to deal with the media regarding this particular incident.

Given the prominent role played by the internet in informing the wider public about developments in Naga Hammadi, it appears that security forces took measures to monitor internet users and perhaps used this information later in their arrests as part of the arbitrary arrest campaign noted above. One owner of an internet cafe in the city told the EIPR fact-finding mission that security ordered him and other internet cafe owners to document the name and ID number of all those using the internet and submit the document to the police on their daily evening rounds. Two websites, Copts United and Free Copts, were also blocked.⁴⁹

4. Detention and charging of civil society activists

On 15 January, State Security and criminal police forces arrested a delegation of partisan and civil society activists, bloggers, journalists and one French activist as soon as they arrived at the Naga Hammadi train station on a visit to express their solidarity with the city's residents following the sectarian violence after 6 January and to offer their condolences to the victims' families.

The detained delegation included the following individuals: Israa Abd al-Fattah, Egyptian Democratic Institute; Wael Abbas, blogger; Bassem Samir, Wafd Party member and Egyptian Democratic Institute; Bassem Fathi, Egyptian Democratic Institute; Ahmed Badawi, member of April 6 Youth Movement; Sherif Abd al-Aziz, blogger; Marian Nagi, Reuters journalist; Mustafa al-Naggar, blogger; Ruya Ibrahim, AUC student; Shahinaz Abd al-Salam, blogger; Nasser Abd al-Hamid, member of the Democratic Front Party; Mohamed Khaled, blogger and journalist with *al-Masry al-Youm*; Nadia Zinai, French activist; Amira al-Tahawi, journalist and blogger; Samar Aql, member of the Democratic Front Party; Ahmed Abu Zikri; Ismail al-Iskandarani, blogger; Mona Fouad; Ahmed Fathi al-Badri, member of the Karama Party in Qena; Gamal Fathi; and Bula Abduh, member of the Democratic Front Party.

According to statements given to EIPR researchers by the detainees and information released by several rights organizations who followed the case, immediately upon their arrival, members of the delegation were taken to the Naga Hammadi police station and from there referred to the district security office in the city of Qena.

Amira al-Tahawi, one of the detainees, told EIPR researchers that one of the detainees lost consciousness during the time spent by the delegation in a cell at the Naga Hammadi police station and that the other detainees told police officers, but they refused to remove him from the cell.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ EIPR interview with a person who requested anonymity.

⁵⁰ EIPR telephone interview with Amira al-Tahawi, 16 Jan. 2010.

Mohamed Khaled, a blogger and journalist with the online edition of *al-Masry al-Youm*, told EIPR researchers, "We were arrested as soon as we arrived at the Naga Hammadi station. We found six Central Security trucks and several police cars waiting for us. Security personnel in police uniforms arrested us and let us know that they had a group of plainclothes thugs with them. They put us in the Central Security truck and moved us to the Naga Hammadi police station. The security director of Qena and an officer named Haitham were waiting for us. They made us get out of the Central Security truck one by one. They took all of our personal information and confiscated our cell phones, cameras and IDs. Then we were taken to the Qena district security office in two Central Security trucks, one for the men and the other for the women. We reached the office at 9:30 am. As soon as we arrived, we were subjected to a degrading personal searches and placed in a 4 by 3 meter cell. The food was bread, cheese and water. There was another cell facing us where the female activists were held.

"We were detained for 12 hours until 9 pm when we were all moved to the Public Prosecutor's Office in the Qena courthouse in a truck. I was questioned by the prosecutor for about 30 minutes and charged with joining groups that harm public security, demonstrating, assembly, harming national unity and chanting slogans against the Interior Ministry. The prosecutor asked me, 'Have you joined any political groups or movements? Have you been arrested before? Do you know where these people you're with are from?' After the questioning, security personnel divided us into groups of five and told us that we would return to the district security office. They took me by myself to State Security where I spent 15 minutes in detention, then the police took me back to the security office with the others, who were all stuffed in an even smaller cell with three benches. When the morning came, security personnel refused to bring in the food, drink and blankets that a delegation of politicians brought for us. The soldiers told the delegation, 'They're not here.' Security also refused to let us use the telephone. The situation remained like this until Saturday, 16 January, when they told us that we would be released at about 3 pm."⁵¹

⁵¹ EIPR telephone interview with Mohamed Khaled, 17 Jan. 2010.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The statements contained in this report and the field investigation conducted by EIPR researchers are not, of course, a substitute for an official, comprehensive, independent investigation into the circumstances and events surrounding the attacks in Naga Hammadi. Faced with the absence of such an official investigation, the basic contribution of any non-governmental fact-finding mission primarily consists of identifying the right questions, though not necessarily providing answers.

As such, the pivotal questions raised by this report as formulated by witnesses who gave statements are:

1. Given the background information we provide at the beginning of this report, were the attacks of 6 January connected with electoral alliances and power struggles in the Naga Hammadi district in anticipation of the parliamentary elections scheduled for fall 2010?
2. Did the local or district security apparatus receive any information prior to the 6 January attacks about the threats received by the bishop and Copts of Naga Hammadi, or any other indication of possible attacks on Coptic Christmas? What did security do with this information? Did security fail to anticipate the attacks?
3. What were the details of the plans for securing churches and Coptic areas in Naga Hammadi and Farshout during New Year's and Christmas? Was the security presence sufficient given the sectarian attacks witnessed in the area since November 2009? Did the security apparatus do its part to confront these attacks?

The EIPR makes the following the recommendations to the President, the Public Prosecutor and the Speakers of the People's Assembly and Shura Council:

1. Conduct an official, comprehensive, independent investigation—either through the Public Prosecutor's Office, an independent special commission with legal authority or intermix of the two—to identify those responsible for the attacks of January 2010, either by commission or omission. The investigation should extend to the circumstances surrounding the attacks, at least since the events of Farshout in November 2009 until 10 February 2010.
2. Prosecute those responsible for sectarian attacks in Naga Hammadi, Bahgoura and Tarkas from 6 to 9 January 2010 in a criminal court and disburse fair compensation to those harmed in the attacks.

3. Immediately release all those held illegally, both Muslims and Christians, from the Naga Hammadi police station, and hold to account all those responsible for arbitrary arrests and illegal detentions.
4. Conduct an immediate, independent investigation into reports of the torture and abuse of detainees in the State Security police headquarters in Naga Hammadi and refer those officers and aides responsible to criminal courts on charges of torture.
5. Drop all charges against civil society activists who were part of a delegation expressing solidarity with Naga Hammadi residents; facilitate the work of the media and civil society as vital partners in confronting discrimination and religious bigotry.
6. Guarantee the right of all those charged to a fair trial, including their right to appear before a regular court, and refrain from using the State of Emergency and exceptional courts.