

EGYPT: Coptic teacher cleared of contempt of religion for questions about Muhammad

World Watch Monitor (25.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2KfyriH> – A Coptic teacher has been found not guilty of contempt of religion, after he was charged last month for including wordplays in a set of questions about Islam's prophet, Muhammad.

During the hearing on 19 April, both the headmaster of the school and a local MP defended the teacher, Magdy Farag Samir, saying he had a "good reputation and good manners" and that "he did not mean to insult".

Following the verdict, local Coptic priest Armia Abdou Bebawy told World Watch Monitor: "We thank the Egyptian judiciary for not discriminating between citizens. This case has boosted cohesion and community peace."

He added that Copts "appreciate, respect and cherish everyone's faith".

Why was he charged?

Samir, 49, a teacher of social studies at Barot Preparatory School for Girls in Beni Suef Governorate, had asked his students: "Where was the prophet Muhammad born?" He then

suggested three options: 1. Yathrib (in Saudi Arabia). 2. Mecca (also in Saudi Arabia) 3. Hafiza Abo Tartour (Abo Tartour is a village in Egypt, but also the word for a cone hat).

He also asked: "Who was the nurse of the prophet Muhammad?" The two options were: 1. Halima Al-Saadia (the correct answer). 2. Halima Bta'at El ta'amiya ("Bta'at El ta'amiya" translates as "a seller of falafel", a Middle Eastern dish).

"The students and their parents considered this as an insult to the prophet Muhammad and Islam," said a relative of the teacher, who did not wish to be named, "But Magdy didn't mean any kind of insult, he did that just to facilitate the right answers to the two questions."

Samir was forced to transfer to a different school following the incident, which took place in December, but the parents of his former students also submitted a formal complaint against him to the governorate's Directorate of Education, which was then sent to the Public Prosecution Office for investigation.

On 14 March, Samir was arrested and charged with contempt of religion. He was initially detained for four days, but a day later his detention was extended to 15 days, pending investigation.

'Crimes of contempt in Egypt only refer to contempt of Islam'

“The revolution of June 2013 was supposed to get rid of the religious regime,” a human rights activist from Minya, who also did not wish to be named, told World Watch Monitor, “But this has not been achieved so far. Many Copts are being charged with contempt of religion and jailed for nothing ... because the revolution dropped the Muslim Brotherhood but left their ideology unchanged.”

“Egypt’s law of contempt of religion only applies to one side – Islam,” he added. “Crimes of contempt in Egypt only refer to contempt of Islam.”

A Coptic lawyer from Beni Suef, who again wished to remain anonymous, told World Watch Monitor: “The judicial system has recently discriminated against Copts and perpetrated injustice. Copts face judicial discrimination most blatantly in prosecutions for blasphemy.”

Convictions for contempt of religion are “harsh” against Copts, said another Coptic lawyer, from Cairo. “The accused person is charged with several offences, such as ‘provoking sectarian strife’ and ‘contempt of religion’. This is done in order to increase the term of their incarceration,” he said.

“People accused of contempt of Islam are not only sanctioned by the courts but also ostracised by their community, who force Copts to leave their homes,” the lawyer added, saying extremist Muslims play a significant role in cases of contempt of Islam filed against Christians – by assembling in front of courts to put pressure on judges.

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CANADA: Anti-Semitic incidents rise to record level in Canada

JTA (25.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2Hw1ZL1> – Canada had a record number of anti-Semitic incidents in 2017, B'nai Brith Canada reported in its annual audit.

There were 1,752 incidents of harassment, vandalism and violence, a 1.4 percent increase over the record 1,728 last year, according to the Audit of Antisemitic Incidents released Tuesday.

The vast majority of the incidents took place in Canada's two largest provinces. Ontario recorded nearly half the total, with 808, while Quebec had 474. The rest were scattered among

the nation's eight other provinces.

Acts of anti-Semitic vandalism doubled to 322 from 158 – the audit called it a “whopping national increase.”

The audit also saw as a “disturbing anti-Semitic trend” a rise in anti-Semitism from both the far right and far left of the political spectrum.

Quebec, with Canada's only majority francophone population, “is home to Islamist extremist enclaves, a sophisticated far-right scene, and many of Canada's largest anti-Israel groups,” the audit said.

To counter these trends, the audit proposed an eight-point plan to increase resources for police hate crime units, a national “Action Plan” and other measures.

“Anti-Semitism has grown as a serious concern for Canadian Jews, affecting them at school, in the workplace and even in their own places of worship,” B'nai Brith Canada CEO Michael Mostyn said.

“[W]e need a concerted national effort to ensure that anti-Semitic outbreaks do not become a fact of life for Jews in this country, as in other developed countries such as France and Sweden.”

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GERMANY: How should Germany deal with Islamic anti-Semitism?

By Kersten Knipp

Deutsche Welle (24.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2JkixCf> – There have been multiple instances of attacks and threats against Jews in Germany. What motivates such violence, and what steps must be taken to prevent it?

Rapper Felix Blume, known by his stage name Kollegah, [sparked controversy earlier this month](#) with a song that contained the line: “My body is more defined than those of Auschwitz inmates.” That the line pops up rather abruptly in the song makes it stand out all the more, and has helped to fuel the

media firestorm surrounding Blume and his colleague Farid Bang, with whom he recorded the track, titled “Jung Brutal Gutaussehend 3” (Young, Brutal, Good Looking 3).

It is not the first time Blume has made reference to Germany’s Nazi era in his music. His earlier music contains lyrics about the “final solution to the rapper question,” the SS and the Wehrmacht.

In their introduction to their anthology “Deutscher Gangsta-Rap,” sociologist Martin Seeliger and social psychologist Marc Dietrich write that a central characteristic of rap is the “presentation of hardness,” the “presentation elements of power fixation,” and “versions of hyper-masculinity.” Anti-Semitism does not necessarily have a history within the genre, but the sales figures of Kollegah’s album indicate that his fan base is still supportive of his work.

A new form of anti-Semitism

The fact that Blume converted to Islam at the age of 15 has fueled the ongoing debate in Germany over Islam and the issue of anti-Semitism. An incident earlier this month in Berlin, in which a [young Syrian man was filmed attacking two other young men wearing kippahs](#) with a belt, sparked uproar in the country.

“Other than the classic anti-Semitism from the right and increasingly the left, anti-Semitism among Muslims poses great challenges to us,” the head of the Central Council of Jews in

Germany, Daniel Botmann, said several days ago during a speech in Berlin. It is important to keep in mind that Israel-oriented anti-Semitism is not a problem that only exists in Muslim communities, he went on. “Nonetheless, Muslim communities must credibly and thoroughly fight anti-Semitism within their own ranks and make it their own matter.”

A similar sentiment was expressed back in December by then-Justice Minister (and now Foreign Minister) Heiko Maas. He said the principle that anti-Semitism will not be accepted in Germany must be conveyed “not only to every German student, but also to the people who have come to Germany in the past few months and years as refugees. Many have hardly had any reason to deal with German history. On the contrary, they often come from countries in which the powerful stir up hate for Jews and Israel and anti-Semitism has almost become a cultural matter of fact.”

Countermeasures required

Resolute countermeasures are called for, said Ahmad Mansour, a Muslim social psychologist from Israel, in a German political TV talk show this past weekend – adding that such measures are nowhere in sight. “We don’t offer clear values to the youths and other people who approach us,” he said. “We don’t show them what society expects of them, we don’t tell them why this society won’t tolerate anti-Semitism.”

Demands are twice as high on the society that accepts migrants in their midst in times when some of these migrants apparently do not or at least do not sufficiently deal with the standards

of the country they have moved to, but perhaps don't even accept them.

[The Muslim communities have to take a stand](#), too, according to Mansour: "We need mosques that do more than stage vigils, or participate in the German Islam Conference's press conference only to say, that's something we condemn. We need mosques that will say during Friday prayer that in this country, people must not question Israel's right to exist."

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German Muslim leader says anti-Semitism is a sin

Deutsche Welle (24.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2r3nGav> – The head of Germany's Central Council of Muslims has said anti-Semitism is sinful and must be tackled. His comments came after Chancellor Angela Merkel voiced concern about a "new

phenomenon” of anti-Jewish sentiment.

Hatred and abuse of Jewish people are against the tenets of Islam, the president of Germany’s Central Council of Muslims, Aiman Mazyek, said, adding that the Muslim community had work to do in tackling the problem.

“Anti-Semitism, racism and hatred are great sins in Islam, therefore we will also never tolerate that,” Mazyek told the Tuesday edition of the regional newspaper *Rheinische Post*.

The Muslim leader made his comments in response to remarks by German Chancellor Angela Merkel to an Israeli broadcaster at the weekend. [Merkel told Channel 10 News](#) that “refugees and other people of Arab origin are bringing a different form of anti-Semitism into the country.”

Mazyek said he accepted that Merkel’s comments had been sufficiently “nuanced,” recognizing that anti-Semitism had not arrived with refugees. However, he admitted there was a problem.

“We take it very seriously that there is anti-Semitism present among some refugees,” Mazyek told the Düsseldorf-based newspaper. He added that the Central Council was organizing meetings between Jews and refugees, and that it was running educational programs that included visits to memorial sites at former concentration camps.

Merkel had made her comments after reports of several anti-Semitic attacks by Muslims in Germany in recent weeks. In [one instance that was caught on camera](#) last Tuesday, a man was attacked for wearing a Jewish skullcap in Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg district. The victim, in fact, said he was not Jewish but an Arab Israeli. A 19-year-old Syrian [turned himself in to the police](#) after the attack sparked outrage across Germany.

During her interview, the chancellor also spoke about wider anti-Semitism in German society, saying she found it "depressing" that synagogues and Jewish schools still had to be protected by police around the clock.

President of Germany's Central Council of Jews Josef Schuster on Tuesday advised individuals in large German cities to avoid wearing headwear such as the kippah or yarmulke where it might invite danger.

Schuster said that "in principle" it would be best to show one's faith defiantly, as evidenced in a campaign started by the Jewish community entitled "Berlin wears the kippah."

However, Schuster added: "In spite of this, I would actually have to advise individuals against openly appearing in large city environments wearing a kippah."

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French politicians, celebrities condemn 'new anti-Semitism'

France24 (23.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2q0PdeZ> – More than 250 French dignitaries and stars have signed a manifesto denouncing a “new anti-Semitism” marked by “Islamist radicalisation” after a string of killings of Jews, published in the Sunday edition of *Le Parisien* newspaper.

The country's half-a-million-plus Jewish community is the largest in Europe but has been hit by a wave of emigration to Israel in the past two decades, partly due to anti-Semitism.

“We demand that the fight against this democratic failure that is anti-Semitism becomes a national cause before it's too late. Before France is no longer France,” reads [the manifesto](#) co-signed by politicians from the left and right including ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy and celebrities like actor Gérard Depardieu.

The signatories condemned what they called a “quiet ethnic

purging” driven by rising Islamist radicalism particularly in working-class neighbourhoods. They also accused the media of remaining silent on the matter.

“In our recent history, 11 Jews have been assassinated – and some tortured – by radical Islamists because they were Jewish,” the declaration said.

The murders referenced reach as far back as 2006 and include [the 2012 deadly shooting](#) of three schoolchildren and a teacher at a Jewish school by Islamist gunman Mohammed Merah in the southwestern city of Toulouse.

Three years later, an associate of the two brothers who massacred a group of cartoonists at satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo killed four people in [a hostage-taking at a Jewish supermarket](#) in Paris.

In April 2017, an Orthodox Jewish woman in her sixties was thrown out of the window of her Paris flat by a neighbour shouting “Allahu Akhbar” (God is greatest).

The latest attack to rock France took place last month when two perpetrators stabbed an 85-year-old Jewish woman 11 times before setting her body on fire, in [a crime treated as anti-Semitic](#).

Her brutal death sent shockwaves through France and prompted 30,000 people to join [a march in her memory](#).

Condemning the “dreadful” killing, President [Emmanuel Macron](#) reiterated his determination to fighting anti-Semitism.

“French Jews are 25 times more at risk of being attacked than their fellow Muslim citizens,” according to the manifesto.

It added that some 50,000 Jews had been “forced to move because they were no longer in safety in certain cities and because their children could no longer go to school”.

(FRANCE 24 with AFP)

More information :

Le Parisien: <https://bit.ly/2qSuNCt> – <https://bit.ly/2q0X0aH>

L'Express: <https://bit.ly/2HQ0Meq>

Le Vif: <https://bit.ly/2HnkSvH>

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GERMANY: Justice Minister Katarina Barley warns of rising anti-Semitism

Deutsche Welle (21.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2HQCRM7> – “Anti-Semitism is becoming socially acceptable again,” said Katarina Barley. Her statements came in the wake of an anti-Semitic attack that shocked Berlin.

Germany’s Justice Minister Katarina Barley warned about rising anti-Semitism on Saturday following [an assault on a young man](#) wearing a kippah in Berlin.

“We have to admit that anti-Semitism is becoming socially acceptable again,” Barley told the Funke Media Group. “It’s our job to work against this development.”

Barley said that it was important to stress to newcomers that religious discrimination “has no place in Germany,” and that “anyone who promotes anti-Semitism will have to reckon with the firm hand of the law.”

On Tuesday, a young man called Adam, an Arab Israeli, decided to wear a Jewish skullcap in his Berlin neighborhood as a social experiment – to see if he would face prejudicial treatment, as a friend told him he might.

In a video shared widely on social media, Adam and his

companion were rushed at with belts by a man yelling “Jew” at them in Arabic.

“At that moment I realized I have to take a video of it. I wanted to have evidence for police and the German people and the world to see how terrible it is these days as a Jew to go through Berlin streets,” he told DW. His alleged assailant [has been arrested](#).

In response, Berlin’s Jewish community is planning a “Berlin wears a kippah” campaign, mobilizing people of all religions to don the head covering in a show of inter-faith solidarity.

According to Germany’s anti-Semitism commissioner, “1,500 anti-Semitic attacks are registered by police every year.”

Additional information about anti-Semitism in Germany:

Huffington Post: Germany Confronts Rising Anti-Semitism After Rap Duo With Holocaust Lyrics Wins Award (19.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2Hi1SP1>

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German police investigate anti-Semitic attack in Berlin

Video

<https://jfda.de/blog/2018/04/17/antisemitischer-angriff-in-berlin-prenzlauer-berg/>

BBC (18.04.2018) –
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43812273> – German police are investigating an assault on two young men in Berlin, in which the attacker was filmed shouting anti-Semitic abuse.

The men say they were harassed in the Prenzlauer Berg area on Monday while wearing Jewish skullcaps (kippahs).

A video of the incident, which was later shared on Facebook, shows the attacker hitting the men with his belt.

He is heard shouting “Yahudi”, an Arabic word for Jew, before being dragged away by another man.

One of the victims, a 21-year-old Israeli called Adam, then reportedly followed the attacker but gave up after a glass bottle was thrown at him.

“I’m surprised something like this happened to me. I’m still in shock,” he told Israel’s Kan television channel.

“It happened right here, next to my home, when I was on my way to the train station with my friend.”

He said a group of three men started insulting them and became angry when they were asked to stop.

“One of them ran at me,” he said. “I immediately felt it was important to film because I didn’t think we could catch him before police arrived.”

The video of the attack was shared on Facebook by the [Jewish Forum for Democracy and against Anti-Semitism \(JFDA\)](#), which said the attack was unbearable to see.

“I used to always advise my Jewish friends and acquaintances not to wear a kippah so as not to show their Jewish identity. I changed my opinion,” a spokesman said.

“We must take up this fight and be visible again in public.”

In a twist to the story, the Israeli victim later told German media that he had grown up in an Arab family in Israel and was not himself Jewish. He had been given the kippah a few days before by a friend from Israel who had told him it was dangerous to wear one in Berlin and he wanted to see if that was true.

Germany's Jewish population has grown rapidly since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Before 1989, the population was below 30,000 but an influx of Jews, mainly from the former Soviet Union, has raised the number to more than 200,000.

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YEMEN: Inflammatory speech by the Houthi leader targets Bahá'ís in Yemen with genocidal intent

Baha'i International Community (19.04.2018) – In a televised speech broadcasted to a wide audience within and outside of Yemen, the leader of the Houthis vehemently vilified and denounced the Bahá'í Faith, further intensifying the ongoing persecution of the Bahá'ís in that country.

On 23 March 2018, Mr. Abdel-Malek al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthis in Yemen, gave a speech on the occasion of the first Friday of the Islamic month of Rajab, which commemorates the introduction of Islam to Yemen, to rally Yemenis against foreign powers and ideologies.

In the course of his speech, Mr. al-Houthi employed a rhetoric reminiscent of statements made by the Supreme Leaders of Iran in former and recent times and strongly denounced the Bahá'í Faith. Mr. al-Houthi warned Yemenis of the “satanic” Bahá'í “movement” that is “waging a war of doctrine” against Islam. He described Bahá'ís as infidels and deniers of Islam and the Prophet and he spread other falsehoods about the Faith and its relationship to western countries and Israel. Finally, he urged Yemenis to defend their country from the Bahá'ís and members of other religious minorities under the pretext that, “those who destroy the faith in people are no less evil and dangerous than those who kill people with their bombs”.

Within days of his speech, over twenty news sites reiterated his negative comments about the Bahá'í Faith, and a prominent Houthi writer and strategist commented on social media that "we will butcher every Bahá'í". Similar sentiments were expressed by religious authorities in Sana'a including the Mufti of Yemen, Shams al-Din Muhammad Sharaf al-Din, who received his education in Iran and was appointed by the Houthis last year. He spent a portion of his weekly Friday talk, aired live on television and radio on 30 March, cautioning Yemenis across the country of the influence of the Bahá'ís. Furthermore, the Ministry of Information held the first in a series of workshops to train Yemenis active on social and traditional media on how to respond to the war of doctrine waged by the Bahá'ís. Other similar seminars, conferences and workshops were also organized by the Ministry of Information and government universities in Sana'a, Hudaidah, Dhamar, Imran, and Hujjah. Finally, a few days ago a Yemeni TV program named "Frankly" dedicated an episode to attack human rights organizations and the Bahá'í Faith, specifically referring to individual Bahá'ís by name and displaying their photographs.

"Not only is the content of Mr. al-Houthi's speech deeply concerning, but also its context and some of its immediate consequences," explained Ms. Bani Dugal, Principal Representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations. "Mr. al-Houthi's influence over a large number of armed followers as well as the echoing of his sentiments by the highest religious authority in Yemen, by other government officials, and by others on traditional and social media all imply that Mr. al-Houthi's latest speech is a call for mass atrocity crimes against a religious minority which is genocidal in intent."

Ms. Dugal further stated, "In order to avoid disastrous consequences for thousands of Yemeni Bahá'ís, the international community must condemn these latest actions by Mr. al-Houthi in the strongest terms, to demand an end to the spread of vitriolic, false rhetoric, and incitement to hatred against the Bahá'ís, and to call for the immediate release of all Bahá'ís imprisoned in Yemen."

These latest developments constitute a severe escalation of the systematic pattern of activity undertaken by the authorities in Sana'a to oppress the Yemeni Bahá'ís—a pattern punctuated by the mass arrest in August 2016 of over 60 women, men, and children participating in an educational gathering organized by Bahá'ís; the call in April 2017 for the arrest of over two dozen prominent members of the Bahá'í community and the subsequent detention of several Bahá'ís, including members of Bahá'í institutions; and the court pronouncement in January 2018 for the public execution of Mr. Hamed bin Haydara, a Bahá'í detained since 2013 for his religious beliefs, and the dissolution of all Bahá'í Assemblies in Yemen. Despite mounting pressure, at present, six Bahá'ís remain in prison, Mr. Haydara's death sentence remains to be repealed, and some prominent Yemeni lawyers have refused to accept his appeal case in the fear of possible repercussions. Reports further indicate that the Houthis are monitoring and seeking to identify the Bahá'ís.

Several independent sources have repeatedly confirmed that Iranian authorities are directing efforts to persecute the Bahá'ís in Yemen. Multiple reports further indicate that high-ranking officials in the National Security Bureau are maintaining pressure on the Bahá'í community as a result of instructions from Iran despite repeated appeals by prominent Yemenis, including some among the Houthis, for the release of

the imprisoned Bahá'ís.

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EGYPT: 102 Churches to be Legalised in Egypt

Egypt Streets (18.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2EUHRfF> – Prime Minister Sherif Ismail has approved the legalisation of 102 unlicensed churches and 64 church-associated buildings according to the MENA news agency.

The policy transpired on Monday during a meeting with a regulating committee charged with reviewing and legalising unlicensed churches.

It is extremely difficult in Egypt to gain church building

licenses, with the process often taking years, which means that many Egyptian Christians congregate in unlicensed churches. However, as of late, regulations appear to be loosening. January saw an order issued from Egypt's Ministry of Housing allowing Christians to practice their religious rites at unlicensed churches pending legislation procedures, while in February the Cabinet's Committee approved the legalisation of 53 churches and church-affiliated buildings.

Indeed, 2016 saw the [passing of a law](#) that eased regulations around obtaining licences for building Christian houses of worship, building on the 2014 constitution which guarantees the right to freedom of religious practice for Muslims, Christians, and Jews.

Christians are a religious minority in Egypt and the issue of building churches in the country has been particularly controversial. According to Catholic News Agency, Egypt has about 2,600 churches in the entire country, meaning there is one church for every 5,500 Christian citizens, while there is one mosque for every 620 Muslim citizens.

There has been a number of incidents where often-Muslim mobs have instigated attacks against Christian citizens and damaged or destroyed churches, particularly in Upper Egypt.

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EGYPT: Disputed status of Beni Suef church sparks sectarian violence

By Hadeer El-Mahdawy

Translated by Habiba Effat

MadaMasr (18.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2Hd5WEt> – The homes of several Coptic Christians in the Beni Suef village of Beni Menin were set ablaze by Muslim villagers on Monday night in the latest incident of sectarian violence, according to a member of the village who spoke to Mada Masr.

Monday's violence was preceded by attacks on a church building used for worship in the village, as well as homes and shops owned by Copts, which took place on April 14, the source added.

The Fashn Prosecution, which has jurisdiction over the region

in which the village resides, issued four-day detention orders on Monday for 20 people and arrest warrants for 10 others in connection to the April 14 events, according to the privately owned [Al-Shorouk newspaper](#). The 20 people that are currently in custody include nine Coptic Christians and 11 Muslims, who have been charged with illegal assembly and disrupting public peace, according to Ishaq Ibrahim, a researcher on religious freedoms at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR).

Security forces also arrested five Copts during the attacks that took place on Monday, according to a Coptic villager, who spoke to Mada Masr on condition of anonymity and fled Beni Menin upon hearing that a warrant had been issued for his arrest on charges of inciting violence against Muslims. All of the Coptic men from the village have taken refuge in neighboring villages, with only a number of women and children remaining in Beni Menin, the source added.

Another Coptic villager who spoke to Mada Masr on condition of anonymity stated that investigation authorities have accused the five Copts arrested on Monday with setting their own houses on fire. However, he told Mada Masr that the Coptic men had been arrested while attempting to extinguish the fires, which were set off when someone threw Molotov cocktails at their residences.

A Muslim villager denied stories of Monday's attacks, stating that they had been fabricated.

The conflict began over the legal status of the church

building, an issue that has often served as a tinderbox for sectarian strife. On April 11, the first Coptic source was summoned to the Fashn Police Station, where police officer Mohamed Rabea threatened to report him for conducting prayers in the church building “without a permit.” The source told Mada Masr that Copts in the village have used the building to pray for a decade.

“The officer asked Coptic villagers to coordinate with the National Security Agency and to stop holding prayers in the building,” the source said. On April 12, security forces arrested Magdy Roushdy Labib, the son of the previous owner of the church building, who sold it in 2010 to Bishop Stephanous of Biba and Fashn, the source added. “The sale was registered in court for the purpose of holding prayers in the building.”

According to the Coptic villager, a Fashn priest subsequently submitted documents to confirm the building’s status as a site of worship in 2017, as part of a survey of churches and church buildings in Fashn that was conducted after the issuance of the [church building law](#) on September 28, 2016.

Ibrahim attributes the frequent occurrence of these sectarian events to this very same law. Out of 3,500 applications submitted by churches to legalize their status, only 219 churches and affiliated buildings have been approved by the government committee responsible for reviewing these applications since the issuance of the new law in 2016. The committee, which stopped receiving new applications in September 2017, confirmed the status of 53 church buildings in [March](#) of this year, as well as an additional 166 [on Monday](#).

“A police officer at the station asked the son of the previous owner to sign an eviction notice,” the Coptic villager stated. When he refused, because he did not legally have the right to do so, the police officer issued a cease and desist order on grounds of ‘inciting religious discontent.’ Last Friday [April 13], officials attended the inauguration of a mosque in the village. The officials informed Coptic residents that there was no problem holding prayers in the church. However, churchgoers were surprised when, on [April 14] during a church service, they received a phone call warning them of an attack on the church. They evacuated the building, but matters escalated, resulting in attacks on several Coptic-owned homes and shops.

The attacks were not limited to the church building and its immediate vicinity, the Coptic villager stated.

“Although I live a kilometer away from the church, they attacked my house with bricks and Molotov cocktails and broke the windows. My children and I were terrified, and my daughter was hit in the head by a brick. I couldn’t even leave the house to take her to the local hospital,” he said. “The police arrived three hours after the clashes and arrested a number of Muslims and Copts in the village.”

The source who had fled from the village said he had left with one of his brothers, while another had been arrested. He said, “I don’t know where we can go. Don’t we have the right to pray? Aren’t we Egyptians? Why should I be attacked and have to run away and leave my work and home just because I pray and say the name of the Lord?”

Mada Masr was unable to reach the Fashn archbishopric responsible for the church in question for official comment.

The Muslim villager presents a different account of the events, however. Security sources informed Muslim villagers on April 12 of the existence of a church that had previously been unknown and was not licensed, the source told Mada Masr.

Village elders intervened to prevent the situation from escalating, the Muslim village said, adding that, on April 13, Copts and Muslims in the village participated in the inauguration of a local mosque. On April 14, a group of children began fighting in front of Coptic homes, the source stated.

“They were messing around and we sprayed water on them. They left,” he said, adding that a Coptic villager fired shots into the air from a rooftop, which provoked neighboring residents and gave rise to fighting.

The Muslim source said that he intervened to protect the homes of his Coptic neighbors during the attacks out of a sense of duty. He feels the situation was blown out of proportion, however, since Copts and Muslim in the village have always lived in peace and harmony.

An estimated 200 to 250 Coptic Christians live in Beni Menin, according to Ibrahim, which he put as a relatively low figure. Although this was the first attack of its kind in the village, there have been similar incidents, with the most recent

occurring earlier in April, in a village in the governorate of Qena.

The houses attacked also included one owned by a Muslim villager, according to the second Coptic source, who added that the Muslim man was forced to sign a police report at the station accusing Copts of arson.

While the causes of sectarian violence in Upper Egypt are complex, Ibrahim asserted that the legislation that regulates church legalization plays an important part. He described the law as “discriminatory,” saying it increases sectarian tension by implying that the construction of churches is a problem, especially in villages where Copts are a minority, as they are in Beni Menin.

The researcher added that the state wished to continue controlling churches and violating the rights of individuals to worship freely and did not take necessary measures to stem violent and discriminatory discourse or address those found to be inciting sectarian violence.

According to a [report](#) in November 2017, from the time the new church building law was issued until October 2017, EIPR recorded 20 incidents of attacks or sectarian tension linked to the practice of religious rites, with the governorate of Minya witnessing nine incidences, followed by Beni Suef with five incidences, and Sohag with three, Cairo with two and Alexandria with one.

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