

Somalia: Prof. Mahmoud Ahmed-Hamdi, a humanist, is safe outside the country

– HRWF (25.06.2020) – On 2 March 2020, Professor Mahmoud Jama Ahmed-Hamdi informed HRWF about alarming death threats targeting him in Somalia. HRWF and Humanists International helped him for his relocation in a safer country. As he was also a human rights defender, HRWF could get him a relief grant.

Professor Mahmoud Jama Ahmed-Hamdi was a university lecturer in Somalia until he was arrested on 21 March 2019 for a Facebook post that authorities deemed to be “blasphemy.” He was then sentenced on 30 April 2019 to 2 1/2 years in prison.

In the Facebook post that led to his conviction in April 2019, Professor Ahmed-Hamdi commented on the need to take a more proactive approach to recurring droughts in Somalia that have been devastating for individuals and the state as a whole. The current strategy to preventing and combatting these droughts is to pray. This was his Facebook post in response to that:

‘The advanced countries make rain but we are still praying to get rain, although despite our prayers we are still suffering every year from drought.

The advanced countries, those we are considering that they are unbelievers and God hates them, live in prosperity even if God hates them. It means that they overcame God by knowledge and using reason.

So, we should learn and base our life on reason and knowledge, not on Myths.'

After spending ten months and seven days in prison, Professor Ahmed-Hamdi received conditional presidential amnesty and was released on 27 January 2020. However, the conditions of his release entailed severe limitations on his freedom.

Threats of violence and death

Professor Ahmed-Hamdi had previously received death threats targeting both him and his wife due to his advocacy for human rights, but now that he has been convicted of blasphemy, he is at risk from both the state and non-state actors.

He had been banned from working as a professor and could not share his thoughts, beliefs or knowledge with anyone in any form; otherwise he risked more jailtime or even the death sentence.

After Professor Ahmed-Hamdi was arrested, an individual sent his wife an email saying: 'once your husband leaves prison I will kill him.'

Furthermore, Professor Ahmed-Hamdi emailed HRWF on 2 March 2020 about another death threat, one that was of particular concern as it had the potential to incite an entire congregation to violence:

'In the Friday [28 February 2020] prayer sermon, a preacher called Adam Sunnah spoke about me and demanded to kill me, as he denounced the prison sentence that I spent because he said that the legal ruling that I deserve is murder.

This preacher was imprisoned several times for terrorism, and he was released from prison only four months ago, as we were together in the same prison, but in two different blocks.

In this sermon he speaks in the first half of it about another Somali writer who is now residing in the West, and in the second section starting from minute 28 he starts talking about me in a very provocative way.'

You can find the recording of this sermon here:
<https://youtu.be/vQNRJS37fq8>.

In 2019 and as of June 2020, HRWF's Database of FoRB Prisoners in the world only contained one humanist in prison in Somalia: Professor Mahmoud Jama AHMED-HAMDI.

HRWF Comment: Prison sentences for humanists and atheists

Atheists suffer a wide range of penalties and discrimination in many countries today.

Egypt, which was ranked 185th out of 196 countries by the Freedom of Thought Report 2019 of *Humanists International*, has been the most dangerous place for humanists, atheists and the non-religious in the world as it is the main country where they have been sentenced to prison terms on blasphemy and contempt of religion charges in the last decade.

However, in 2019 and as of June 2020, no atheist or humanist was in prison in Egypt while there are still a Sunni and a Coptic Orthodox in detention.

In June 2014, an appeal court upheld a **five-year sentence** handed down in absentia to **Karam Saber** for his short story collection entitled "Where is God?". The accusations against Saber included: Insulting the divine, writing short stories which call for atheism, defaming divinity, and inciting strife. In his defense, Saber claimed that: "[In the stories], I expose the fake religious discourse and detect the scale of contradictions in a patriarchal society that claims religiousness while it practices the opposite, especially in terms of oppressing women. I pose simple questions that seek God amid all this absurdity we are living in".

He was said to have violated Article 98 of the Egyptian Penal Code which provides a sentence of six months to five years and a fine of 500 to 1,000 Egyptian pounds [approximately €25 to €50 Euro] for anyone who uses religion to propagate 'extremist ideas' to incite strife, insult a monotheistic religion, or damage national unity.

In 2016, **Mustafa Abdel-Nabi** was charged with blasphemy for

postings about atheism on his Facebook page and was ultimately sentenced in absentia to **three years in prison**.

EGYPT: 70 church buildings legalised, church and mosque demolished

*Egyptian authorities **legalised** 70 church buildings for worship purposes on Tuesday 19 May*

CSW (21.05.2020) – <https://bit.ly/2XBdZ3k> – The decision was issued following a meeting of the Government Committee that oversees the legalisation of churches, which was chaired by the Prime Minister. This decision brings the total number of churches that have been legalised since the committee commenced its mandate in 2016 to 1638.

The legalisation of church buildings remains a controversial issue. Local authorities demolished a church building in Koum Al-Farag, Al-Behera governorate, on Wednesday 20 May following sectarian protests. The one-storey building had been used for worship purposes for 15 years. A few years ago local Muslims constructed a mosque next to the building, hoping to prevent it from being legalised as a church. According to an ancient Islamic tradition (or common law), churches are prevented from

being formally recognised or displaying any Christian symbols if a mosque is built next to them.

Recently, two additional floors had been constructed in order to accommodate the growing congregation, which sparked sectarian tension. To prevent further escalation, local authorities demolished both the church building and the mosque that was built next to it. 14 Christians, including the local priest and 4 women, were arrested when they tried to stop the authorities from demolishing the building.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said: "CSW welcomes the legalisation of more churches in Egypt, and we encourage the administration to continue on the path of reforming legislation and addressing societal attitudes and practices that restrict the right to freedom of religion or belief. While the legalisation of these places of worship is a welcome development, we remain concerned by the destruction of both the church and mosque in Koum Al-Farag, which is not an effective way of addressing sectarian tensions. The government must work with local authorities to formulate civic interventions that address and transform the societal attitudes underpinning sectarian tensions."

Although there have been noticeable improvements in the treatment of the Christian community during President Sisi's time in office, sectarian incidents continue to occur in certain localities, including the kidnap and forced conversion of Christian women. Such incidents are usually resolved through extra-legal community reconciliation sessions, which are often characterised by bias and unbalanced rulings that deprive victims, primarily Christians, of justice. CSW continues to call for those responsible for such incidents to

be held to account through the legal system.

On 1 May the Coptic Orthodox Parish of Al-Manofyia [withdrew](#) from a civil society initiative to contain and resolve sectarian incidents via inter-community dialogue. The Egyptian Family House, a joint initiative that was created in 2011 by the Coptic Orthodox Church and Al-Azhar, aims to strengthen religious harmony and create grassroots solutions to sectarian tensions.

The parish issued a statement in which it condemned the lack of action on the part of the Egyptian Family House in the case of the abduction of Rania Abdul-Masseih Halim, a Christian woman who disappeared on 22 April and subsequently [reappeared in a video](#) in which she claims to have converted to Islam and no longer wanted anyone to search for her. Her family believes these claims were made under duress.

Actor's revelation about transgender son sends shock waves across conservative Egypt

A prominent actor's disclosure about his daughter's transition has been met with a rare show of support in a conservative society with little tolerance for gender nonconformity.

By Shahira Amin

Al-Monitor (12.05.2020) – <https://bit.ly/3e2V0Kr> – Egyptian actor Hesham Selim raised eyebrows when he disclosed in a TV interview broadcast on Al-Kahera Wal Nas Channel May 3 that his daughter, Noura, was undergoing gender transition.

“My daughter Noura is now my son Nour; it is God’s will,” the actor said. He added that he was not surprised when Nour came out as a transgender person at the age of 18. “The first time I held Noura after she was born, I could see that ‘she’ looked more like a boy than a girl. I always had doubts about ‘her’ gender identity.”

Eight years ago, Nour told his father he did not feel in harmony with his body. “It was very brave of him to speak out as we live in a society where such issues are taboo,” Selim told the show’s presenter.

In the conservative patriarchal society, few dare talk openly about gender transition because of the stigma attached to gender nonconformity. Selim nevertheless, expressed support for his son’s decision, saying, “As his father, I can only encourage him to live the life he has chosen.”

Nour, who has yet to complete his transition, is facing challenges in changing his gender designation on his national identity card, Selim said in the interview. “Things are extremely difficult for people like my son. I deeply sympathize with families that are going through such an ordeal,” he noted.

While Selim's revelation sent shock waves across the country, it earned him more praise than criticism on social media. Many activists commended his "courage" and expressed their support for him and his son.

One Twitter user expressed doubt, however, that Selim would have gotten the same level of support had he announced that the transition was from male to female. Acknowledging Selim's "bravery," the activist added, "He has thrown a stone into still waters, causing ripples. His disclosure may lead people to rethink their attitudes toward transgender people."

Members of Egypt's transgender community celebrated Selim's announcement as a step toward reversing the widespread antipathy toward transgender people.

"This is a remarkable step forward and a marked change signaling greater social acceptance and a more supportive environment for transgender people," Malak el-Kashif, an outspoken transgender woman and rights activist, wrote on her Facebook page May 3.

Like many fellow members of Egypt's LGBTQ community, Kashif has suffered discrimination, abuse and even persecution. The 20-year-old, who was registered as a boy at birth, got approval from the Egyptian Medical Syndicate to change her gender three years ago and has since performed several gender reassignment surgeries.

Kashif has gained a massive following chronicling her transition on social media and also advocates for transgenders' rights in her articles published on the Transatsite, an Arabic-language portal dedicated to gender identity issues.

But Kashif has paid a price for her visibility, as she has been arrested three times in what she told Al-Monitor were "attempts by the authorities to silence me." She recalled, "On one occasion in 2018, I was arrested at a checkpoint on my way to [the town of] Dahab, after the officer who searched my bag found my medical records and some dresses. I was taken into custody on the accusation of traveling with the intent of engaging in illicit sexual conduct."

In March 2019, Kashif was arrested again – this time over a Facebook post calling for demonstrations to protest a deadly Cairo train crash that had taken place some days earlier.

"I was clearly being punished for my activism and was forced to undergo a humiliating anal examination at a public hospital," Kashif said.

Such examinations have been denounced by the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms as "a flagrant violation of privacy and human dignity" and tantamount to "torture." Kashif, who has yet to change her gender designation on her ID card, was held for four months in solitary confinement in an all-male prison on charges including "aiding a terrorist organization" and "misusing social media by spreading false news on Facebook."

After her release in July 2019 pending further investigations, she filed a legal complaint demanding separate cells for transgender inmates in police stations and prisons.

“Those who have not completed their transition should be separated from other prisoners to avert the risk of sexual assault at the hands of other inmates,” she said.

There has been no verdict in the case so far as the court proceedings have been postponed several times. Kashif expects yet another postponement on May 30, the scheduled date for the next court session.

Gender reassignment surgeries are legal in Egypt. In 2013, the Medical Syndicate issued a Code of Ethics recognizing gender identity disorder (GID) as a medical condition, thus paving the way for transgender patients who have GID to undergo sex change surgeries. But these surgeries were being performed in Egypt long before then. In January 1988, in a much publicized case, Sayyid Abdallah, a then-19 year-old medical student at Al-Azhar University, underwent gender reassignment surgery, transitioning to Sally. The case stirred a great deal of controversy and Sally was reportedly punished by the then-dean of the Medical Faculty who refused to admit her for the final exam or have her transferred to the Medical Faculty for girls. The Medical Syndicate accused the surgeon who performed the operation of committing “a grave error.”

Today – more than three decades later – perceptions of gender transition have not changed much – the procedure is still

largely frowned upon as “sinful” and “tampering with God’s creation.” That perception may have been shaped by the Islamic hadith citing that “God has cursed effeminate men who imitate women.” Former Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa, however, affirmed in a 2014 TV interview broadcast on the Egyptian CBC channel that “it is a duty for transgender persons – and their families – to correct their gender to end their state of confusion.”

The surgery is only permissible for hermaphrodites (those with male and female reproductive organs), Gomaa said, adding that it is forbidden in cases of a person choosing to behave or look like the opposite sex but only has the traits of his or her birth gender.

Gomaa’s view was reiterated by Dar al-Iftaa, the authority that issues religious edicts, in response to a question by Al-Monitor (via its hotline) on whether such surgeries are halal (permissible). “If a medical specialist decides that the surgery is in the patient’s interest and is necessary to protect him or her from harm, then it is permissible. But it is forbidden in cases where there are no medical grounds and a man simply desires to become a woman or vice versa,” an Iftaa cleric said.

Up until 2016, transgender people were able to undergo gender reassignment surgeries at public hospitals without charge. This is no longer the case and “permits for such surgeries are now harder to obtain,” Hashem Bahary, a professor of psychiatry at Al-Azhar University, told Al-Monitor in a telephone interview.

A sex correction committee – made up of a psychiatrist, a medical expert from the Medical Syndicate and a cleric from the Ministry of Endowments – had met periodically to review requests for gender transitions and approve or reject them on a case-by-case basis. But the committee has not convened since early 2016, leaving those wishing to change their gender with no option but to turn to private hospitals and clinics.

“Many private clinics take advantage of trans patients’ desperation, charging exorbitant fees – sometimes for botched surgeries,” Mozn Hassan, a women’s rights activist and founder of Nazra for Feminist Studies, told Al-Monitor.

A gender reassignment surgery costs in the range of 25,000 Egyptian pounds (around \$1,600), according to Bahary, who said that the surgeries are beyond the means of the average Egyptian. Al-Azhar’s Psychiatric Center, which had offered transgender patients psychological support for nearly two decades, was shut down in 2017 at the behest of Al-Azhar Grand Imam Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, according to Bahary, who said he continues to offer his LGBTQ patients free mental health services at his private clinic.

Transition is a complex and tedious process in Egypt, often taking several years to complete. It involves two years of psychological treatment, medical tests and approvals by religious authorities and medical specialists.

“After completion of the transition, a report is submitted by forensic experts to the Interior Ministry requesting permission for the change in gender designation on ID cards,”

Bahary said.

Waad Mohamed Ahmed (nicknamed Cinderella), a 28-year-old Alexandria-based lawyer, has been more fortunate than most. Identified as a boy at birth, she performed her first gender reassignment surgery five years ago at a private hospital at her own expense. She then underwent a second surgery at Kasr el-Eini public hospital in Cairo. It took several months to change her gender status on her ID card after approval from forensic experts. "The worst time for me was before the transition. I was ostracized by my family and was persistently sexually harassed on the street," she told Al-Monitor.

Her biggest concern today is finding a suitable marriage partner. "When men who are attracted to me learn about my past, they shy away," she said.

In a society with little tolerance for gender variance, the biggest challenge for transgender Egyptians is gaining societal acceptance.

"Selim's disclosure about his son's transition is a milestone in transgender Egyptians' fight for recognition and respect," Hassan said. "Not only has he broken a longstanding taboo, but he has also brought to public attention the dire need to integrate this marginalized minority group into the mainstream."

Is Salafism making a comeback in Egypt?

By Rami Galal

AL-MONITOR (26.08.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2lznUqq> – Egypt's Ministry of Religious Endowments granted on Aug. 7, for the first time since 2014, Vice President of the Salafist Call Sheikh Yasser Borhami a [preaching permit](#) for Friday sermons between Aug. 1 and Aug. 31 at Al-Kholafaa Al-Rashdeen Mosque in Alexandria.

Borhami has repeatedly [sparked controversy](#) in the past with the fatwas he issues, including one barring Muslims from sending holiday greetings to Coptic Christians, another banning people from watching soccer games and one forbidding children from decorating their bedrooms with Disney character posters.

The Ministry of Religious Endowments [issued a law](#) in June 2014, according to which only imams who are graduates of [Al-Azhar University](#) are authorized to preach, and only after [passing an interview](#) with the nationwide endowments directorates affiliated with the ministry, which in turn issue the preaching permits.

The permit granted to Borhami includes seven instructions he must follow: First, he must abide by the [unified sermon](#) imposed by the Ministry of Religious Endowments, as per its July 2014 decision. Also, Borhami must abide by the [Ash'ari](#)

[doctrine](#), a moderate Islamic school of thought adopted by Al-Azhar. Second, his sermon must not exceed 15-20 minutes.

Borhami must not address any political or controversial issue in his sermon and no fatwas shall be pronounced in mosques. In addition, no religious lessons shall be given other than the Friday sermon preapproved by the ministry. Borhami must abide by the instructions issued by the ministry. He is also not allowed to move from one mosque to another unless there is prior approval from the director of the endowments directorate, the director of the department of preaching permits at the ministry and the area inspector appointed by the ministry to monitor preaching across the country. Finally, the permit shall also be considered personal property and must be preserved.

The return of Borhami to preaching has raised many questions and criticism from secular citizens in Egypt, such as intellectual [Khaled Montaser](#), and from parliamentarians such as [Nadia Henry](#). This is mainly because Borhami's fatwas in the past promoted hostility toward Copts, and he has not apologized for them. Meanwhile, Samir Sabry, a prominent Egyptian lawyer, [filed a complaint](#) against Sheikh Mohammed Khashaba, undersecretary of the Ministry of Religious Endowments in Alexandria, who granted Borhami the preaching permit.

In this regard, Abdul Moneim Shahat, the spokesman of the Salafist Call, told Al-Monitor, "Borhami holds a bachelor's degree in Islamic studies from Al-Azhar University, and he applied in this capacity for the preaching permit before the Ministry of Religious Endowments, not in his capacity as deputy head of the Salafist Call. The Ministry of Religious

Endowments does not deal with organizations such as the Salafist Call, but deals with each person as an individual by assessing them to ensure they meet the conditions required to obtain a preaching permit.”

Shahat noted, “The new measure taken by the ministry now includes its instructions – which were repeatedly published before – in the permit. What I am not sure of is whether the ministry decided on generalizing this measure to all permits, or whether it was something specific to Sheikh Borhami. But the instructions are not new, and there are no specific instructions that were only formulated for Borhami.”

He added, “The existence of a peaceful Salafist movement that rejects bloodshed and respects the tacit understandings [reached] with non-Muslims is the first guarantee to curb the spread of violence and takfiri [extremist] orientations.”

The [Salafist Call](#) was founded in Egypt in 1977. At first, its activities were limited to social and preaching work, and it refused to participate in political life. Meanwhile, the security forces were lenient toward the Salafist Call, compared to other Islamist movements, because it [the Salafist Call] did not seek to reach power and its presence undermined the Muslim Brotherhood’s monopolization of the Islamist current in the country.

But after the January 25 Revolution the situation changed. The Salafist Call formed its political wing, the Nour Party, which won 112 out of 508 seats in parliament in the 2012 legislative elections. After June 30, 2013, the movement faced increasing

calls to dissolve it under the pretext that it is a religious party despite supporting the revolution. The army, however, rejected those calls as the dissolution of the Salafist Call would have changed the balance of power among Islamist currents. And thus, although the Salafist Call still enjoys political support, it came under harsh media campaigns, and ultimately faced a setback in the 2015 parliamentary elections, winning only 12 seats out of 596.

Ahmed Karima, a professor of comparative jurisprudence at Al-Azhar University, told Al-Monitor, "I feel that Salafism is being swept out of Saudi Arabia to be settled in Egypt with the help of international parties and forces that do not want stability in Egypt. And while Al-Azhar University professors are not allowed to speak out and preach, Borhami, the author of radical fatwas and patron of Salafism in Egypt, is granted this permit."

Often professors who oppose the current regime in Egypt do not receive their preaching permits from the Ministry of Religious Endowments despite meeting the conditions.

There is a tendency today to [get rid of Salafism](#) in Saudi Arabia. Several Salafist preachers, fearing the campaigns led by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, have fled to Egypt and settled mainly in Alexandria, the stronghold of Salafism in Egypt.

Karima added, "Salafists led by Borhami consider all Muslims [Sufis and Shiites] who do not adhere to their ideology as apostates, and accuse Al-Azhar of corrupt beliefs for

following Ash'ari doctrine. Salafism spread in Egypt through Gulf funds and the movement managed to create bases for extremist thought through [media] channels. For example, Sheikh Mohammed Hassan – a leading Salafist preacher – is building a [30-acre Islamic complex](#) in 6th of October City, with nurseries to teach children the principles of Salafism. Salafism is not a threat to [Al-Azhar](#), but a threat to Islam.”

Secretary of the parliamentary Religious Committee Amr Hamroush told Al-Monitor, “I strongly condemn the recent decision by the Ministry of Religious Endowments to grant a preaching permit to Borhami – even if such permit was for a month or subject to restrictions – because this man did not apologize for past extremist fatwas. Borhami’s thoughts have not changed, even if he pretends to abide by the provisions of the [Ministry of Religious Endowments](#) to be able to preach. Therefore, I ask the ministry to reconsider this permit and withdraw it.”

HRWF Comment: The Salafist ideology, a totalitarian ideology

The Salafist movement is often divided into three categories: the purists (or quietists), the activists and the jihadists.

“Purist Salafists” focus on non-violent preaching of Islam, education, and “purification of religious beliefs and practices”. They dismiss politics as “a diversion or even innovation that leads people away from Islam”. They never oppose their rulers, even in autocratic regimes.

“Activist Salafists”, unlike the “purists” are engaged in political processes. They advocate political reform but eschew violence. Due to numerical superiority, the movement has been referred to as the mainstream of the Salafist movement at times.

“Jihadist Salafists” began developing an interest in armed jihad during the mid-1990s. According to Mohammed M. Hafez, a specialist on foreign fighters and suicide bombers, Salafi jihadism is an “extreme form of Sunni Islamism that rejects democracy and Shia rule.”

Despite some similarities, the different contemporary self-proclaimed Salafist groups often strongly disapprove of one another and deny the other’s true Islamic character.

The three branches of Salafism share the same totalitarian ideology, the one implemented by ISIS and like-minded armed movements. They share the same objective: to impose a totalitarian system of governance.

See HRWF paper: [“Islamic Minorities, A New Challenge to Religious Freedom” presented at the conference Religions and Human Rights](#)” held by the University of Padua in April 2016.

Watch Aljazeera Video Debate: [What is wrong with Islam today?](#)

EGYPT: Coptic Christian arrested for allegedly insulting Islam on Facebook in Egypt

ChristianHeadlines.com (18.06.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2Ne82aD> – A young Coptic Christian man has been arrested near Cairo, Egypt for allegedly insulting Islam after a hacker posted material on his Facebook page, he and family members said.

Fady Yousef, 25, was arrested early in the morning of June 11 in Giza, southwest of Cairo, despite having posted a video explaining that hackers had placed the offending material on his Facebook page, according to the Coptic Bishopric of Maghagha and El Edwa in Minya.

The previous night (June 10), Muslim extremists angry over the offending material attacked his parents' home in Eshneen el Nasara village, near Maghgaha in Minya Governorate, about 260 kilometers (160 miles) south of Giza, according to a statement from the bishopric.

“On Monday [June 10] some extremists reaching a few hundred from Eshneen el Nasara village and the villages around it attacked the home of Yousef Todary,” the statement from Bishop Anba Aghathon read. “They entered and destroyed the contents of the house, then moved to the house next door where his

brother lived and attacked it from the outside. They were shouting against the Christian religion and the Copts of the village.”

Yousef Todary, his wife and daughter were able to escape minutes before the Muslim extremists broke in and destroyed the refrigerator, television set, mattresses, furniture and windows, according to the bishop.

Stating that Muslim extremists alleged the post was insulting to Islam, the bishop defended Fady Yousef, reiterating that he said his Facebook was hacked.

The young Copt posted an apology on the page saying he would never do such a thing, and that people who knew him know this well. His sister, Nermeen Yousef, also posted a clarification, saying her brother apologized not because he did anything wrong, but because people mistakenly believed that he was the author of the post, according to Copts United.

“He is apologizing because he respects your feelings,” she wrote. “He is not a child to do such a thing, and also his friends are Muslims and always tell me they are dear to him and they know this well.”

Along with Fady Yousef, police also detained his brother and uncle; two other uncles turned themselves in as soon as they heard that police sought them, according to various sources. They were all transported to Minya pending investigations, and on Friday (June 15) Copts United reported that the brother and

uncles had been released.

Yousef is in custody facing charges of posting material offensive to religion, according to Copts United. Insulting a heavenly religion (Islam, Judaism and Christianity) in Egypt, where the state religion is Islam, is punishable by up to five years in prison and a fine of 500 to 1,000 Egyptian pounds (US\$30 to US\$60), according to Article 98(f) of the Penal Code.

Police reportedly arrested 25 people suspected of attacking the home of Yousef Todary and those of other Christians in the village, as well as others who wrote posts on social media to instigate attacks.

Police reportedly dispersed angry crowds and set up protective posts in Eshneen el Nasara and other villages. They also set a protective perimeter around the village the following Friday (June 14) in anticipation of possible violence, according to Copts United.

The bishop's statement noted that Reda Eid, a Muslim from the same village, during Easter posted derogatory words against Christianity, the church and its leadership. Eid later went to the church leaders to apologize, taking some of his Christian friends with him, according to the statement. Father Soliman responded "You are our son, you came here and I accept your apology, we are all brothers," thus ending the incident, according to Copts United.

Egypt ranked 16th on Open Doors' 2019 World Watch List of countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian.