

EGYPT

Human rights abuses by armed groups

BACKGROUND

Political violence has been one of the main characteristics of Egyptian life in recent years. The cycle of violence pitting the security forces against armed Islamist groups, especially in Upper Egypt, since the beginning of 1992 has left at least 1300 people dead. The victims have included civilians, as well as armed Islamists and members of the security forces. Armed groups have been responsible for three assassination attempts on the lives of senior government officials during this time: the Minister of Information, Safwat al-Sharif, in March 1993, the former Minister of the Interior, Hassan al-Alfi, in August 1993, and the Prime Minister, Dr 'Atef Sidqi, in November 1993, as well as the attempt on the life of President Mubarak in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in June 1995. Other officials targeted by the groups included senior officers from the State Security Investigations Department (SSI). Among them was the Deputy Head of the SSI, Ra'uf Khayrat, who was assassinated in April 1994 in Cairo. In the name of fighting "terrorism" the security forces have committed gross human rights violations. Amnesty International has over the years issued numerous reports detailing these violations and urged the government, which it holds responsible, to put an end to them¹.

There are a number of Islamist groups and movements in Egypt which vary widely in terms of their objectives, organization and strength. Some, like the Muslim Brothers, founded in 1928, tend to draw support from the middle and professional classes and currently advocate a program of condemning the use of "terrorism" or "violence", while others, based mainly in rural areas and who draw their support from the youth, are clearly using violence, including killings of civilians, to achieve their aims.

The two main Islamist groups in the country which use violence and which are the subject of this report, are *al-Gihad* (Holy Struggle) and *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* (Islamic Group), which appeared on the Egyptian scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s, respectively. At the end of the 1970s a group of young Islamist activists, mainly students at Asyut University in Upper Egypt, formed *al-Gihad*. A few years later, in 1981, the same group was responsible for the assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat, reportedly because of his visit to Jerusalem

¹See [Egypt: Ten years of torture](#) (AI Index: MDE 12/18/91, published in October 1991); [Egypt: Security police detentions undermine the rule of law](#) (AI Index: MDE 12/01/92, January 1992); [Egypt: Grave human rights abuses amid political violence](#) (AI Index: MDE 12/03/93, May 1993); [Egypt: Military trials of civilians - a catalogue of human rights violations](#) (AI Index: MDE 12/16/93, October 1993); [Egypt: Human Rights defenders under threat](#) (AI Index: MDE 12/15/94, September 1994); [Egypt: Deaths in custody](#) (AI Index: MDE 12/18/95, October 1995); [Egypt: Indefinite detention and systematic torture: the forgotten victims](#) (AI Index: MDE 12/13/96, July 1996) and [Egypt: Women targeted by association](#) (AI Index: MDE 12/11/97, March 1997).

in 1977 and his signature of the peace treaty with Israel. Hundreds of Islamists were detained and tortured, and some of them, including leading members of *al-Gihad*, were tried and sentenced to long-term imprisonment. In 1983, for the first time, the name of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* began to appear in underground statements and publications. The spiritual leader of the group is said to be 'Omar 'Abd al-Rahman, currently serving a life-sentence in the US². The group has a political and a military wing.

Both groups seek an Islamic state based on Shari'a law and both have had recourse to violence as a means to achieve this goal. *Al-Gihad* is the smaller of the two groups, its activities are concentrated mainly in the capital although the group first appeared in Asyut. It has targeted senior government and military officials, including the 1993 attempted assassinations of the three ministers mentioned above. *Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* is active mainly in Upper Egypt, its followers are young, frequently university educated, originating mostly from rural poor areas especially in Upper Egypt and in Cairo. It has targeted Coptic Christians, tourists, policemen and officers from the SSI. The group has been responsible for grave human rights abuses of concern to Amnesty International in the country in recent years. Scores of civilians, including Coptic Christians and foreign tourists, were deliberately killed in situations where the victims, unarmed, were apparently targeted because of their actual or supposed religious beliefs or country of origin.

On 2 September 1990 Dr 'Ala' Mohy al-Din 'Ashour, the spokesman of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, was shot dead in a Cairo street, reportedly by people shooting from an unmarked car. There were strong allegations that he may have been extrajudicially executed by plain clothes security officers. By means of retaliation, alleged members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* shot dead the Speaker of the People's Assembly (Parliament), Dr Rif'at al-Mahgoub, and five guards in Cairo on 12 October 1990. Thousands of Islamist activists were subsequently arrested. Mass arrests of suspected members of or sympathizers with armed Islamist groups, particularly *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* and *al-Gihad*, continued throughout 1991 and 1992. Arrests were mostly concentrated in poor and densely populated districts of Cairo such as 'Ain al-Shams and Imbaba, and in Upper Egypt, particularly in the Asyut and Minya governorates. Most were released after a few months' detention without charge or trial, but others continued to be held without charge or trial in administrative detention, or were tried before (Emergency) Supreme State Security Courts and, since the end of 1992, before Military Courts whose procedures fall far short of international standards for fair trial. Torture has been used systematically against Islamist detainees. Some Islamist activists have publicly claimed that it was the security forces' "brutal" way of dealing with members of these groups which encouraged political violence in the country.

²He and nine others were convicted in October 1995 of conspiracy to carry out "terrorist" attacks in the US, including blowing up the United Nations, other New York City landmarks and plans to assassinate political leaders including President Hosni Mubarak.

Many of the killings and other acts of violence committed by *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, are claimed in statements sent to national newspapers and international news agencies. In some cases leaders of the group based abroad have stated that certain acts of violence were carried out by members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* acting independently of the leadership, and therefore without their endorsement. They explained that those members responsible were cut off from the leadership of the group who are either in prison or abroad. *Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* was responsible for two of the worst massacres in the country in 1997. Since the Luxor massacre in November 1997 no other killings of this magnitude have been perpetrated. Arrests of its members continue to take place; some of its leaders remain in prison while others are in exile. Thousands of members and sympathizers of the two groups have been detained without charge or trial, some for as long as eight years. Others are serving long-term prison sentences passed after unfair trials before exceptional courts. Since October 1992 when President Mubarak started issuing special decrees referring civilians, all alleged Islamists, to be tried by Military Courts, 85 death sentences have been passed by these courts and 64 executions have been carried out (as of August 1998).

In July 1997 five leaders of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, Karam Zuhibi, Nagih Ibrahim, 'Abbud al-Zumr, Hamdi 'Abd al-Rahman, Fu'ad al-Dawalibi, all serving long-term prison sentences in Tora Penitentiary, issued a statement which was read at a military court session by one of the Islamist defendants³. The statement called for a halt to violent acts by *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*. That call allegedly led to disputes among leading members of the group. However, the call for a halt to violence was more or less respected until 17 November 1997 when news broke out of the worst massacre of foreign tourists in Egypt.

THE LUXOR MASSACRE: THE CULMINATION OF A FIVE-YEAR WAR AGAINST TOURISTS AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Tourism is a major source of revenue for Egypt. Hundreds of thousands of Egyptians depend on the industry for their livelihood. Soon after the onset of political violence at the beginning of 1992, *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, recognizing the importance of tourism to the government, decided to target it. Over the next five years members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* ambushed and attacked buses, Nile cruise boats and passenger trains carrying foreign tourists. Scores of tourists were killed and many others injured. Most of these attacks took place in the south of Egypt, particularly in Qena governorate where some of the country's most famous pharaonic tombs and temples are located, and in Cairo. In September 1992, *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* started

³This was the trial of 97 defendants before a military court. Charges against them included the planting of bombs outside nine banks in 1995, the killing of the deputy head of the SSI, Ra'uf Khayrat, in 1994, the possession of explosives, and the alleged membership of an illegal armed organization (*al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*).

issuing statements warning foreign tourists not to visit Egypt and stating that it would attack them until the government agreed to release detained and imprisoned members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, to put an end to the torture of detainees and to the practice of detaining relatives when police fail to apprehend suspects.

Soon after those statements appeared *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* carried out the first attack on foreign tourists. On 1 October 1992 gunmen from the group fired at a Nile Cruise boat carrying more than 100 German tourists near Asyut. Three Egyptian crew members were injured but no one was killed. The first foreigner killed was a British tourist, Sharon Hill, aged 28. Two others, David Wilson and Michael Smith, were injured when a minibus carrying them and three other British tourists was attacked by armed men, believed to be members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, near the town of Dayrut on 21 October 1992.

From October 1992 to January 1996 at least 30 attacks were carried out on buses, trains and cruisers carrying tourists. Many foreign tourists and Egyptian workers were injured, and around 12 tourists were killed during that period. The first attack to have taken place in Cairo was on 7 January 1993 when an armed man, reportedly a member of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, threw a bomb at a bus carrying tourists, though no one was hurt in that attack.

In most cases when *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* claimed responsibility for killings or other attacks, it issued statements claiming responsibility for a specific incident, and adding that the attack was carried out in retaliation for the sentencing by a military court or execution of its members. For example, on 24 February 1994, a statement was issued by the group claiming responsibility for an armed attack on a train carrying tourists near Abu-Tig in Asyut governorate. The statement noted that the attack was in retaliation against the death sentences passed after a trial held in camera by a military court at the military barracks in Sidi Barrani on three members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* who were believed to be members of the Egyptian armed forces⁴. The statement added that the attack was also "part of the [*al-Gama'a's*] policy to target the tourism industry in Egypt... tourists must leave the country...".

From April 1996 until November 1997 three massacres of tourists took place which left 84 dead and many more injured. The first two massacres took place in Cairo whereas the third, and the most recent to date, took place in Luxor. On 18 April 1996, 18 Greek tourists were deliberately killed by four armed members of *al-Gam'a al-Islamiya* outside a hotel in Cairo. Fourteen others, including an Egyptian man, were injured. The 18 killed were among a group of around 150 Greek holiday makers waiting inside and outside their hotel, in Giza near the

⁴The three, Medhat Tahhawi, Mohammad Ahmad Sa'eed Saleh, and Hamada Mohammad Lutfi (sentenced *in absentia*), were among a group of six people accused of planning the assassination of President Mubarak, and were tried in secret by a military court at the beginning of 1994. The execution of the first two took place on 17 March 1994 in Alexandria.

pyramids, to catch buses to go to Alexandria. The tourists were on an Easter visit to some Middle Eastern churches and other religious sites. They had previously visited Israel and had arrived in Cairo on 16 April 1996. The four armed men reportedly got out of a van and started firing at the tourists for several minutes before getting back into the van and driving away. Following the massacre *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* issued a statement claiming responsibility and adding that it believed the tourists were Israeli nationals and that the attack was in retaliation for Israeli attacks in Southern Lebanon. The four armed men who carried out the attack were later said to have been killed by the security forces in Upper Egypt.

The second massacre which took place on 18 September 1997 and which left 10 civilians dead in Cairo was said to have been carried out by two Islamists who were reportedly not linked to *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, although the latter was reportedly suspected of complicity⁵.

The deadliest massacre of civilians that Egypt witnessed in recent years was the Luxor massacre which took place on 17 November 1997. That day at around 9am 58 foreign tourists and four Egyptians were killed in an armed attack at a historical site near Luxor. The six gunmen who carried out the attack were later killed by the security forces



Hatshepsut Temple, site of the massacre of tourists on 17 November 1997

⁵The two armed men carried out a fire bomb and gun attack on a tourist bus outside the national museum in Cairo and killed nine German tourists and the Egyptian bus driver. Initially the Egyptian Government said that the attack was carried out by a “mentally deranged” man, Saber Farhat Abu al-'Ala, and his brother, Mahmoud. Saber Farhat Abu al-'Ala had been responsible for the killing of two US businessmen and a French jurist who were having dinner at a hotel in Cairo on 27 October 1993. After the killings, Saber Farhat Abu al-'Ala was admitted to a mental hospital in Cairo. The two brothers were tried by a military court in October 1997 and the end of that month they were sentenced to death. They were executed on 24 May 1998.

following a shoot-out. They had reportedly hijacked a taxi and forced its driver to take them to the pharaonic temple of Queen Hatshepsut. Once at the entrance of the temple, they killed two policemen and two local guards. Eye witnesses and survivors of the massacre reported that the gunmen wore police uniforms. The six gunmen reportedly entered the temple and started shooting at crowds of tourists. The killing spree was said to have lasted for about an hour. Some of those wounded were reportedly finished off by having their throats slit with knives. The victims included 35 Swiss, six Britons, four Germans, a French national, a Bulgarian and a Colombian national. The gunmen then forced a tour bus driver to take them to nearby hills. There the police chased them and a shoot-out ensued. One of the attackers who had been injured by the police and who had collapsed was said to have been shot dead by his accomplices. The rest were trapped and killed by the police.

Following the massacre *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* issued a statement (dated 18 November 1997) claiming responsibility for the massacre and urging foreign tourists not to travel to Egypt. The statement added that armed attacks by the group would continue until the groups' demands were met. These demands included the introduction of Shari'a law, severing diplomatic relations with Israel, the return to Egypt of the spiritual leader of the group, Sheikh 'Omar 'Abd al-Rahman, the release of Islamist detainees and an end to trials by military courts. A few days later, a second statement was issued apologizing for the massacre and claiming that *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* would stop targeting the tourist industry. This statement was issued by a member of the Consultative Council of the political wing of the group living in western Europe. However, on 9 December 1997, a third statement by *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* was issued denying that the previous statement was published by the group. This was a clear indication that the leadership of the group outside Egypt, a few of whom are based in Europe and others reportedly based in Afghanistan, was divided as to the killing of tourists and the continuation of the use of violence in general.

COPTIC CHRISTIAN VICTIMS

Between May 1992 and the end of 1997 scores of Coptic Christians were deliberately and arbitrarily killed by members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*. Most of the killings took place in Minya, Asyut and Qena governorates, all in Upper Egypt. Those targeted for killing included medical doctors, pharmacists, farmers, shopkeepers and jewellers' shop owners. On numerous occasions, armed Islamists attacked jewellers' shops, killed the owners and stole the gold. In certain cases armed men staged arson attacks on churches. Those killed were reportedly targeted because of their religion. It is believed that some members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* justified the killing of Christians, attacking their shops, stealing their properties and burning their churches by using the notion of *al-istihlal*, i.e. they considered them to be "infidels" and therefore it was legitimate to do what they did. In some cases, Coptic Christians were accused by members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* to have collaborated with the security forces, including revealing identities and whereabouts of members of the group in villages in Upper Egypt.

The massacre of 13 Coptic Christian from the same family in Sanabu near Dayrut (Asyut governorate) on 5 May 1992 by armed Islamists was seen as the key event that triggered a wave of political violence in the country⁶. On 20 May 1992 *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* issued a statement saying that the massacre of the 13 was an act of revenge by members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* for the killings of two Islamists by members of the same Coptic Christian family two months earlier. The statement also issued a warning to the security forces who had, according to the group, killed two members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, one in Dayrut and the other in al-Qawsiya also in Asyut governorate, a few days after the massacre of the 13 Coptic Christians. It stated that any further attack on Islamists by the security forces would lead to violent reactions from the group "against the person who gives the order and against the executioner".

A Christian doctor, Fawzi Bishri Mikhael, aged 40, was murdered by gunmen on 22 July 1993 on his way to his clinic at the Central Hospital in Manfalout, south of Cairo. On 5 August 1993, Philip al-Qummus Basilius, a 36-year-old pharmacist, was murdered by armed men in his pharmacy in Dayrut. In both cases *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* claimed responsibility for the killings.

The most recent massacre of Coptic Christians took place on 12 February 1997 when, in the early evening in the town of Abu Qerqas near Minya in Upper Egypt, five armed and masked men, believed to be members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, burst into Saint George's church and opened fire at 30 young Coptic Christians who were attending a weekly religious gathering. Nine people died instantly. Two brothers, 'Adel Mikhael 'Abd al-Mallak, aged 26, and Milad Mikhael 'Abd al-Mallak, aged 25, were among the dead, as well as a 17-year-old woman, Ulfat Boutros Shaker. A tenth person, Ayman Redha Girgis, a 21-year-old medical student, died later in hospital of gunshot wounds. This was the first time that an



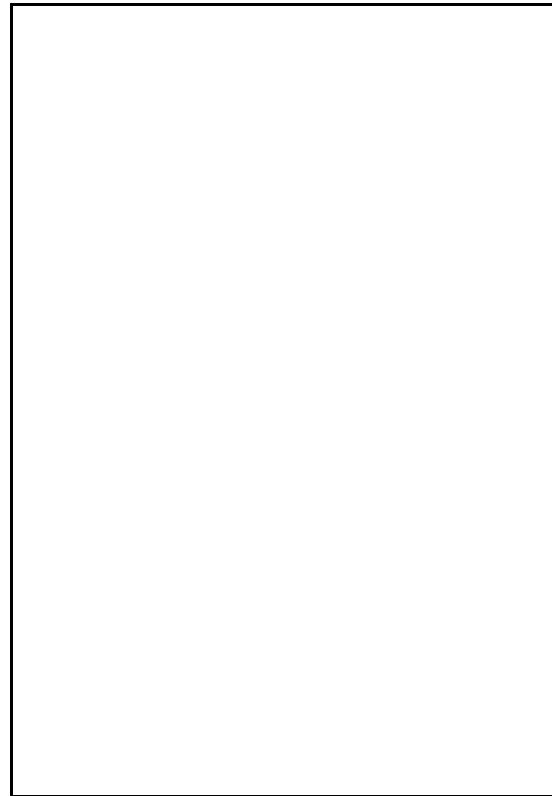
Inside of St. George's Church where 10 Coptic Christians were killed on 12 February 1997

⁶In the late 1970s and 1980s Egypt witnessed many sporadic acts of political violence, mostly by armed Islamists. Coptic Christians were killed on a number of occasions and churches were burnt.

armed attack had taken place inside a church since 1992. The five assailants were said to be aged between 26 and 29 and were from Abu Qerqas itself. On 15 February 1997 the Egyptian police named the five suspects and appealed to the public for information on their whereabouts. Two days after the massacre *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* issued a vaguely-worded statement, on the one hand denying responsibility, but also acknowledging the possibility that some members of the group, cut off from the leadership of the group, may have carried out the attack. "In a situation like this.", according to the statement, "excesses were bound to happen", then adding that it also did not rule out the involvement of government forces or "Zionist quarters" in the massacre.

Amnesty International has in recent years also received reports that some Coptic Christians, mostly in villages in Minya and Asyut governorates, were threatened by armed Islamists, believed to be members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, that if they failed to give them money they would be killed. Some of those threatened reportedly paid sums of money and were spared. Others refused to pay and moved away to other towns or cities. In a few cases when the security forces discovered that a few Coptic Christians were allegedly paying money to members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* they arrested them and detained them without trial for up to several months, allegedly on the grounds that they were providing financial support to the group. Most were said to have been released at the beginning of 1998. One of those who refused to pay, Kenz Sa'eed Kenz, moved with his family from the village of Bani 'Ubeid near Abu Qerqas in Minya governorate to Cairo in 1995. He told Amnesty International:

...in the middle of June 1995 threats from *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* against our family started... Members of *al-Gama'a* began to send us letters asking us for money, but we refused to pay. They sent us several letters.... Initially when they sent us the first letter they



Closed shop and house belonging to Kenz Sa'eed Kenz, who was forced to leave the area after threats by armed groups

mentioned 10,000 Egyptian pounds, when we refused to pay then they sent us another letter increasing the figure to 15,000 Egyptian pounds, but we refused to pay.... We got in touch with the security forces... the [SSI] officers initially said that we should pretend to be paying, i.e. get the money ready and meet with *al-Gama'a* and then the security forces would come to the meeting place and arrest them..., we refused because there was a risk that there would be a shoot-out and anyone could then be killed. We contacted the priest who contacted Pope Shenouda and then they contacted the headquarters of the SSI in Cairo. The latter contacted the SSI in Abu Qerqas and told them that we should leave the village because we were at risk, especially after we refused to pay. They were unable to protect us. We left our house and grocery shop and took whatever we could, and moved from the village of Bani 'Ubeid. We stayed with our relatives in Minya. We wanted to sell the house and grocery shop but *al-Gama'a* threatened any prospective buyer. The written threats (letters) were brought to the grocery shop, usually two men would come inside the shop and two others would wait outside to monitor the situation. They had visited the shop three times before June 1995. Three months later (in September) we returned to the village after news broke out that four terrorists who had threatened us were killed by the security forces. We got the full names of the four: two of them were from our village. Before we returned we contacted the security forces in Bani 'Ubeid and they said that we should go back because they had killed the "terrorists". We stayed in Bani 'Ubeid for one month without really doing any work, we were most of the time indoors in our house. After one month we received a written threat (letter) in which we were told that either we paid or we would be killed. We contacted the security forces and they said we should leave the village otherwise they would not be responsible for anything that might happen to us. We left the village immediately and went to Cairo. My brother Ibrahim was teaching in Abu Qerqas. We also had a jewellery shop in Abu Qerqas. Both this shop and our grocery shop had been closed since mid-1995. There was someone who was keen to buy our house but was threatened by *al-Gama'a* not to buy it.

'Issam Zaki Milek is from Bani 'Ubeid which he left in November 1996 to move to Cairo. Threats against him reportedly began in June 1995. At the end of December 1995 alleged members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* asked one of his employees to inform him that they wanted 3,000 Egyptian pounds from him. He refused to pay and a few days later SSI officers came to his house and took him away, reportedly on the grounds that he was financially helping armed Islamists. He was taken to a police station in Abu Qerqas and then to the SSI building in Minya where he was interrogated about links with *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*. He was held for three days and then released on 3 January 1996. He told Amnesty International that the reason they were suspicious of him was that a few days earlier nine armed Islamists had been killed in a shoot-out

by SSI forces in a small village called Balansura, around five miles away. They were said to have found in the pocket of one of the dead men a letter listing the names of around 50 people from whom *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* was demanding money. Both his and his brother's names were mentioned. 'Issam Zaki Milek saw the letter in the SSI building in Minya. The names mentioned in that list were reportedly from Bani 'Ubeid and Abu Qerqas and were all Coptic Christians.

On 12 January 1996 'Issam Zaki Milek's 29-year-old nephew, 'Izzet Ishaq Zaki, was killed on his father's farm by three armed men, allegedly members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, in apparent retaliation for the refusal of his father and uncle to pay. 'Izzet's brother who was with him, Redha Ishaq Zaki, aged 23, was injured.

A few weeks before 'Issam Zaki Milek decided to move to Cairo, two agricultural workers at his farm in Bani 'Ubeid, Zakher Youssef Zakher, aged 41, and his son Sa'eed Zakher Youssef, aged 22, were killed by armed Islamists said to be from *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*.

Since he moved to Cairo, whenever 'Issam Zaki Milek wants to visit relatives in Minya he has to contact the SSI. He does not go to the villages because he fears for his safety. The SSI reportedly offered to provide him with a weapon but he refused.

INTELLECTUALS TARGETED

Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya and *al-Gihad* have both targeted writers, journalists, university professors, judges and other public figures who have openly condemned the two armed groups. The groups said they considered them to be "atheists" or accused them of supporting the government. For example on 7 February 1994, *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* issued a statement saying that known communists and secularists in Egypt could be physically eliminated since they were considered to be "fighters against Islam" and "supporters of the dictatorship".

On 8 June 1992 the well-known writer **Farag Foda**, aged 47, was shot dead by two masked armed men who were riding a motorcycle outside his office in Nasr city just outside Cairo. The two armed men had reportedly been monitoring Farag Foda's movements and watching his house in al-Nuzha area in Heliopolis for several weeks. Farag Foda was just about to open the door of his car when one of the attackers riddled him, his 15-year-old son Ahmad, and his friend, Wahid Ra'fat Zaki, with bullets. The writer's driver then tried to chase the assailants and in the event collided with another car as well as the motorbike. The two armed men fell from the motorbike and the people who gathered there managed to effect a citizen's arrest of one attacker, a resident of the Cairo district of al-Zawiya al-Hamra. The other managed to escape. Farag Foda and the other two men were taken to al-Mirghani hospital in Cairo. After an eight-hour fight by surgeons to save his life Farag Foda died as a result of heavy

internal bleeding. At least 10 bullets were found in his body. His son Ahmad and his friend Wahid survived: the first was hit by three bullets and the second with one.

A statement issued by *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* (bulletin no 7, dated June 1992) claimed responsibility for the killing, accusing Farag Foda of being an apostate, of advocating the separation of religion from the state, and favouring the existing legal system in Egypt rather than the application of Shari'a (Islamic law). He was killed for his beliefs.

Farag Foda was born near Damietta in the Nile Delta. He was a professor of agriculture and a columnist for the weekly magazine "October". He was known for his writings on political Islam and freedom of expression. He had previously received death threats from armed groups. He allegedly informed the security authorities who designated three security officers to guard his house. He is said to have declined a full-time security escort.

At least 200 suspected Islamists were arrested by the security forces in the al-Zawiya al-Hamra district of Cairo following Farag Foda's killing. Twelve people were tried by an (Emergency) Supreme State Security court on charges of murder, membership of a secret organization, and possession of weapons. 'Abd al-Shafi Ahmad Ramadhan, one of the attackers, was sentenced to death on 30 December 1993 and was executed on 26 February 1994. Three other defendants were given prison sentences ranging from three years to 10 years (two of them *in absentia*) and eight were acquitted. Ashraf al-Sayyid Ibrahim, the second attacker, had been executed on 19 July 1993 in connection with the attempted assassination of the Minister of Information.

On 14 October 1994 **Nagib Mahfouz**, Egypt's best known writer and the 1988 Nobel prize winner for literature, was stabbed in the neck with a knife while leaving his house in Cairo and preparing to get into a car. He spent seven weeks in hospital. *Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* claimed responsibility for his attempted assassination. On 10 January 1995 a military court sentenced two people, Nagi Mohammad Mostafa, who carried out the stabbing, and Mohammad Ghafir Abu al-Farag al-Mahallawi, who kept watch on the writer's house before the attack, to death for their part in the attempted murder of Nagib Mahfouz. Two other men were given life sentences, three were acquitted and nine others received prison terms ranging from three years to life imprisonment. The two sentenced to death were executed on 29 March 1995.

Dr Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid: In a statement issued outside Egypt on 21 June 1995 *al-Gihad* claimed that Dr Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, a university professor, was an apostate and threatened him with death. On 14 June 1995 a Cairo court of appeal ruled that Dr Nasr Abu Zeid had insulted the Islamic faith through his writings and that he and his wife should separate because, as a Muslim, she should not remain married to an "apostate". In August 1996 the Court of Cassation in Cairo upheld the June 1995 ruling. A month later, in September 1996 the Giza Court of Emergency Matters ordered "a suspension of the execution" of the ruling made by the

Court of Appeal in June 1995. An Islamist lawyer appealed against the new ruling but in December 1996 another court upheld the September 1996 ruling. After the death threat by *al-Gihad* was issued and published in national newspapers and international news agency reports Dr Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid and his wife, Dr Ibtihal Younis, left Egypt to live abroad.

Other well-known figures said to have been threatened by the two armed Islamist groups included former judge Sa'eed al-'Ashmawi, feminist writer Nawal al-Sa'dawi and the actor and comedian 'Adel Imam.

CIVILIANS KILLED DURING SHOOT-OUT OPERATIONS

Many civilians were killed during shoot-outs between members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* and the security forces, or when armed Islamists planted bombs in public places such as cinemas, hotels, banks and trains, in what appear to be indiscriminate attacks. Some of these civilians were killed on busy streets of Cairo when members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* targeted senior government officials and when it was clear that the risk of civilians being killed was high. For example, on 18 July 1993, four civilians were killed and five others wounded in Cairo. The following day, *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* claimed responsibility for the killings and stated that "the missed target was the president of the Supreme Military Court". A 15-year-old girl was killed and 12 people were injured when armed Islamists, members of *al-Gihad*, attempted to kill the then Prime Minister with a car bomb which exploded as his armoured motorcade passed by in Heliopolis on 25 November 1993. During the trial before a military court of those behind the attempted assassination at the beginning of 1994, three other members of *al-Gihad* attacked a car showroom in the town of Shibin al-Qanater, just north of Cairo, and killed the owner, Sayyid Ahmad Yahya, a key witness in the trial who was due to give testimony in court. Two bystanders in the showroom at the time were also killed.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Despite skirmishes between members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* and the security forces in some villages from time to time, political violence in the country appears to have diminished considerably over the last eight months. *Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* issued a statement in February 1998 reiterating its willingness to stop all acts of violence. Since January 1998 the Ministry of the Interior is reported to have released at least 2,000 Islamist detainees who had been held without charge or trial and who according to the authorities had "repented". Also over the last few months no trials of civilians before military courts have taken place.

The Egyptian Government has over the years repeatedly stated that the state of emergency, in force since 1981 following the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat, is an exceptional situation and that its continuing extension aims to fight "terrorism". However, gross human rights violations have been committed by the security forces and emergency legislation has contributed

to a great extent to creating an atmosphere conducive to these violations. Both the Human Rights Committee and the United Nations (UN) Committee against Torture concluded in 1993 that the State of Emergency was a serious impediment to the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, both ratified by Egypt, in 1982 and 1986 respectively.

Amnesty International is once again urging the Egyptian Government to put an end to grave and systematic human rights violations by adopting necessary legal and practical measures to ensure effective implementation of provisions contained in treaties it has ratified. The organization holds the government responsible for the protection of all civilians, including tourists visiting the country.

Amnesty International is also reiterating its call to all armed groups in the country to respect minimum human rights and humanitarian standards, and specifically the right to life. In this respect armed groups should immediately cease targeting civilians for killings, abduction or issuing threats, including death threats against civilians. These groups should also publicly revoke all death threats without further delay.