Refugee Review Tribunal
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RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

1. Please provide details about the 2008 Abu Fana monastery raid(s) and any action by the authorities since: time of day, scale of attack, duration of attack, profile of the perpetrating party, numbers of people involved, lay people present at the time, etc.
2. Please advise if there has been a series of raids on this monastery or just one in recent times.
3. Deleted.
4. Is it common for Coptic families not to report kidnappings of their daughters/sisters for fear of embarrassment and losing face?

RESPONSE

1. Please provide details about the 2008 Abu Fana monastery raid(s) and any action by the authorities since: time of day, scale of attack, duration of attack, profile of the perpetrating party, numbers of people involved, lay people present at the time, etc.
2. Please advise if there has been a series of raids on this monastery or just one in recent times.

Country information stated that there have been at least 12 attacks on the Abu Fana monastery since 2004, with some sources estimating 18 attacks. Information on attacks on the monastery in May 2008, January 2008 and 2006 was found in the sources consulted. A clash was also reported in a neighbouring village, Qasr Hur, in April 2008. The most significant raid is said to have occurred on 31 May 2008. Sources state that at approximately 5.00pm about 60 armed men, from Qasr Hur village, attacked the monastery after construction had commenced on a surrounding wall. Fighting reportedly lasted for at least four hours with the "crisis" lasting months. A report by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) stated that one Muslim villager was killed in the clash, two novices required surgery for gunshot wounds,

priests and monks were injured and three monks were kidnapped. Lay workers were said to be at the monastery. According to *Al-Ahram Weekly Online* this confrontation was the first time in 35 years that Coptic monks were involved directly in violent clashes. A "sit-in" by monks and Coptic Christians was subsequently reported at the monastery as well as demonstrations by Copts in Mallawi, some 30 kms from the monastery.

Information on these matters is provided under the following headings:

Attack on 31 May 2008
Action taken by the authorities after the 31 May 2008 attack
Attack on 20 April 2008
Attack on 9 January 2008
Attacks in 2006

Attack on 31 May 2008

According to a CSW report the attack on the Abu Fana monastery was triggered by a land dispute and the construction of a wall surrounding monastery land:

> Various state bodies involved in this incident, along with the local media, state that the most recent attack on Abu-Fana was based upon a land dispute triggered by the monastery and had no sectarian dimension.
>
> The area of land which is at the heart of the dispute was purchased eight years ago as a patch of desert. The monks began cultivating the land six years ago. The frequent attacks began following the successful cultivation of this desert land.
>
> Due to the frequency of these attacks, the monastery applied for, and obtained, permission to build a wall surrounding the monastery grounds. The attack in May 2008 was sparked by the beginning of the construction of this wall (Christian Solidarity Worldwide 2008, *Egypt: Attack on Abu-Fana Monastery, El Minya*, September, pp.5-6 http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=report&id=101 – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 1).

The CSW report described the attack of 31 May 2008 in the following terms:

> On 31 May 2008 at 5pm, approximately sixty armed men attacked the Abu-Fana monastery after workers began construction of a wall surrounding the monastery. The attackers began destroying the wall and caused extensive damage to a nearby chapel.
>
> A number of monks' cells were set on fire, while a mushroom farm and apiary were also destroyed. A tractor, computer, a range of farming tools and a number of church items were stolen from the monastery. A statement released by the Coptic Orthodox Church identified at least one million LE (approximately £95,000) of damages and theft to the monastery.
>
> During the violence two novices sustained gun shot wounds, and at the time of CSW's visit both men required additional surgery to treat their extensive injuries. Another priest was shot in the foot with a shotgun leaving him with multiple shrapnel wounds. A priest who was working on the cultivated land at the time of the attack was confronted by several men who beat him with the butts of their machine guns. As a result he sustained multiple wounds to his shoulders, back, feet and left leg. In addition to the priests, civilian workers at the monastery were also severely injured.

> As the attackers were leaving, three monks were kidnapped and taken to the local village of Qasr Hur. During their captivity, they had their hands tied behind their backs and were beaten throughout the night by local Bedouins. One monk was hit in the face with a stone, rendering him blind for several days, while another had his leg cleanly broken. In addition, all three monks were beaten repeatedly with guns and sticks and were whipped with electrical cable. They were then made to walk barefoot through a thorny field, where they were thrown against the thorns. The monks were also repeatedly told to spit on the cross, and say the *shahada*. One of the monks then had his head pushed into the sand and stepped on. Having been held captive for approximately twelve hours, the monks were dragged through the local streets before being dumped in a nearby field…
>
> Sadly, this is not the first time that the 4th century monastery at Abu-Fana has suffered attack. It has been attacked by local Bedouins at least twelve times since 2004. [4]
>
> Some reports in the Egyptian media have alleged that there was an exchange of gunfire between the monks and the Bedouin villagers, resulting in the death of Khalil Mohammed, one of the alleged attackers of the monastery. This version of events is unlikely, however, due to the fact that the monks at Abu-Fana do not possess firearms. CSW has also received confidential reports of state security intelligence officers attempting to elicit false information 'proving' that the monks were in possession of firearms through intimidation and threats of mistreatment. However, none of the involved parties, nor the officials and the Egyptian media, deny that shots were fired at the monastery.
>
> [4] Some sources put the number of attacks since 2004 as high as eighteen (Christian Solidarity Worldwide 2008, *Egypt: Attack on Abu-Fana Monastery, El Minya*, September, pp.4-5 http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=report&id=101 – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 1).

Another description of the May 2008 attack is provided by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), an Egyptian human rights organization established in 2002, as follows:

> 10. On 31 May 2008, at approximately 5 pm, monks at the Abu Fana Monastery, located 270 km south of Cairo near the city of Mallawi in the Minya province, came under armed attack by some 60 Bedouin living in Qasr Hur, a village adjacent to the monastery. Shots were fired at the monastery – some reports indicate that there was an exchange of gunfire, but the monks strenuously deny this – for at least four hours, after which security forces arrived to stop the assault.
>
> The clash grew out of a dispute that began several years ago between the monks at the ancient monastery, who have launched a land reclamation effort around the monastery, and Muslim Bedouins living in the adjacent village, who consider the land theirs by right of occupancy; the lands in question are state owned.
>
> During the clashes one Muslim farmer was killed by gunshot whose source remains unrevealed, seven monks were injured, including three who were kidnapped by the Bedouin before being released a few hours later. Information collected by EIPR researchers, also included in a statement issued by the monks, indicates that the assault resulted in the destruction of a small church built on the monastery's farm and its entire contents. Several monks' cells were also burned, and a mushroom farm and an apiary were destroyed; several items were stolen from the monastery and the farm, including a tractor, farming tools, and a computer.

> According to information obtained by EIPR researchers during a visit to the seven injured monks, who were moved to Cairo hospitals for treatment, the monks sustained shrapnel wounds after two of them were shot. They also sustained broken bones, muscle tears, and bruises and injuries due to physical blows, whipping, dragging, and pelting with stones. Some of the injured monks who had been kidnapped by the Bedouin were physically abused and their religious beliefs were denigrated. They were forced to spit at the cross under physical duress and cite the *shahada* indicating their conversion to Islam (There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is His messenger) (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2008, *Freedom of Religions and Belief in Egypt: Second Quarterly Report (April – June 2008)*, July, pp.7-8 http://www.eipr.org/en/reports/FRB_quarterly_rep_jul08_en/Second%20quarterly%20Report%20on%20FRB.pdf – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 2).

A *Daily News* (Egypt) article states that the Bedouins involved in the clashes were from the Qasr Hur village, next to the monastery (Carr, Sarah 2008, 'Legal intervention needed to control sectarian violence, says rights group', *Daily News* (Egypt), 6 August http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=15575 – Accessed 3 November 2009 – Attachment 3).

According to the *Al-Ahram Weekly Online* the Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda III stated that the attacks started 150 metres away from the monastery. The Minya governor was also quoted as saying that the fighting continued until after the kidnapped monks were released (Leila, Reem 2008, 'Fearful signs', *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, Issue No. 901, 12-18 June http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/901/eg6.htm – Accessed 29 October 2009 – Attachment 4; Leila, Reem 2008, 'Just a coincidence?', *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, Issue No. 900, 5-11 June http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/900/eg6.htm – Accessed 27 October 2009 – Attachment 5).

The *Al-Ahram Weekly Online* noted that the "Abu Fana Monastery crisis" "lasted for months. It was also the first time in 35 years that monks were involved directly in clashes:

> …In May [2008], clashes between Muslims and Christians – the burglary of Coptic jewellery shops in different governorates and the Abu Fana Monastery crisis which lasted for months – raised the spectre of sectarian discord in Egypt…(Leila, Reem 2009, 'Accidents the norm', *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, Issue No. 928, 1-6 January http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2009/928/eg7.htm – Accessed 27 October 2009 – Attachment 6).

And

> …2008 was an alarming year in terms of sectarian strife. It was marked by dramatic cases of confrontation, most famously at Abu Fana Monastery in May when Coptic monks were directly involved in violent clashes for the first time in 35 years of on-and-off sectarianism (Ezzat, Dina 2009, 'Blessed be the people of Egypt', *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, Issue No. 929, 8-14 January http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2009/929/feature.htm – Accessed 27 October 2009 – Attachment 7).

Clashes were also reported on 1 June 2008 at a protest by Coptic worshippers outside the Mallawi bishopric, about 30kms from the monastery:

> The day after the attacks, 1 June 2008, hundreds of Coptic worshippers organized a protest demonstration in front of the Mallawi bishopric, which exercises administrative control over the monastery, located some 30 km from the monastery. Demonstrators chanted slogans demanding the resignation of the Interior Minister and asked that those responsible for the attack on the monastery be brought to justice. Eyewitnesses said that police used clubs in an attempt to forcibly disperse the demonstration, injuring at least seven protesters (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2008, *Freedom of Religions and Belief in Egypt: Second Quarterly Report (April – June 2008)*, July, p.8

http://www.eipr.org/en/reports/FRB_quarterly_rep_jul08_en/Second%20quarterly%20Report%20on%20FRB.pdf – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 2).

Similarly, on 1 June 2008 the *Daily News* (Egypt) also reported that "Hundreds of Copts protested in front of the Orthodox Parish in Mallawi and clashed with security forces there" (Hussein, Abdel-Rahman & Samaan, Magdy 2008, 'One Muslim killed, seven Copts injured in Minya clashes', *Daily News* (Egypt), 1 June http://www.dailystaregypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=14131 – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 8).

News sources reported that monks staged a "sit-in" at the monastery in late June 2008–early July 2008 to protest against a decision by an arbitration committee to remove a wall built around the monastery. The numbers of persons taking part in the sit-in were variously reported as 1,000 monks, 1,000 monks and priests with 60 Coptic citizens and 75 monks and priests with a further 60 Copts (Nkrumah, Gamal 2008, 'Stuck with each other', *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, Issue No: 903, 26 June–2 July http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/903/eg7.htm – Accessed 27 October 2009 – Attachment 9; Kamal, Teresa & Nafie, Said 2008, 'Committee Resumes Work at Abu Fana Monastery, Monks Stage Sit-In', US Copts Association website, 25 June http://www.copts.com/english/?m=200806&paged=2 – Accessed 29 October 2009 – Attachment 10; Leila, Reem 2008, 'Back to the wall', *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, Issue No: 904, 3-9 July http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/904/eg8.htm – Accessed 27 October 2009 – Attachment 11; Hussein, Abdel-Rahman 2008, 'Another sectarian outbreak in Fayoum, Abo Fana attack lingers on', *Daily News* (Egypt), 22 June http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=14590 – Accessed 29 October 2009 – Attachment 12; Bayoumi, Amr 2008, 'Fana Monks Continue their Open Sit-in; Cut Road to Monastery with Stones and Palms Stumps', US Copts Association website, 22 June http://www.copts.com/english/?p=1964#more-1964 – Accessed 2 November 2009 – Attachment 13).

On the number of monks at the monastery it may be of interest that two sources noted that the Abu Fana monastery housed 30 monks and 10 novices. However, another article stated that the monastery was "home to 15 monks and hermits" (Hussein, Abdel-Rahman & Samaan, Magdy 2008, 'One Muslim killed, seven Copts injured in Minya clashes', *Daily News* (Egypt), 1 June http://www.dailystaregypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=14131 – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 8; Leila, Reem 2008, 'Just a coincidence?', *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, Issue No. 900, 5-11 June http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/900/eg6.htm – Accessed 27 October 2009 – Attachment 5; Leila, Reem 2008, 'Fearful signs', *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, Issue No. 901, 12-18 June http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/901/eg6.htm – Accessed 29 October 2009 – Attachment 4).

Action taken by the authorities after the 31 May 2008 attack

In its most recent religious freedom report, dated 26 October 2009, the US State Department outlined actions taken by the authorities in relation to the May 2008 raid. It noted that after the attack police maintained a presence on the road to the monastery and also that the National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) carried out an investigation:

> As of the close of the reporting period, the Government had not prosecuted any of the Bedouin villagers who assaulted the Abu Fana monastery in May 2008, and those who concurrently kidnapped, physically abused, and reportedly attempted forcefully to convert several monks. The armed assault also resulted in the death of one Muslim man, as well as

> multiple injuries including gunshot wounds to monks and the destruction of the chapel, artifacts, and some of the monks' cells. The NCHR investigated the attack, which according to independent human rights groups had its origin in a land dispute. Authorities continued to detain without charges two Copts arrested in connection with the death of a Muslim villager, brothers Refaat and Ibrahim Fawzy Abdo, despite a December 2008 court order requiring their release. Police were reportedly slow to respond to the attack, but since the attack have reportedly maintained a presence on the road leading to the monastery. The three monks abducted from the monastery were reportedly rescued by security services. Reports also claimed the two brothers were being detained to pressure Coptic authorities not to press for official prosecution of the perpetrators. Human rights advocates reported that this instance exemplifies an increasingly prevalent pattern of governmental authorities detaining Copts following sectarian attacks and either holding them without charges or threatening false charges and a police record; the detentions serve as a tool to blackmail Coptic authorities to desist from calling for official action to prosecute the perpetrators, and to dissuade the victims and/or their families from seeking recourse in the judicial system for restitution of damages (US Department of State 2009, 'Abuses of Religious Freedom' in *International Religious Freedom Report 2009 – Egypt*, 26 October – Attachment 14).

Also on action taken to protect the monastery the CSW reported in September 2008:

> To date, no action has been taken by the state to protect the monastery from further attacks. Although there is now a regular police presence at the entrance of the monastery, it serves more to control visits to the monastery by international press and observers. On 8 June 2008, two visitors were assaulted by local Bedouins on their way to the monastery, requiring hospital treatment (Christian Solidarity Worldwide 2008, *Egypt: Attack on Abu-Fana Monastery, El Minya*, September, pp.6-7 http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=report&id=101 – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 1).

In a June 2008 report the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) listed 19 names of people said to have been arrested in relation to the May 2008 raid. Two of the arrested, Refaat Fawzy Abdu and Ibrahim Fawzy Abdu, were identified as Christians. On the latter two arrests US State Department's 2009 religious freedom report noted that the two brothers continued to be detained in spite of a December 2008 court ruling ordering their release. In May 2009 the Assyrian International News Agency website reported that the brothers were detained for a third time despite being released again by a May 2009 court ruling (Egyptian Organization for Human Rights 2008, *Citizenship Crisis Erupted Again*, 16 June http://en.eohr.org/?p=44#more-44 – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 15; US Department of State 2009, 'Abuses of Religious Freedom' in *International Religious Freedom Report 2009 – Egypt*, 26 October – Attachment 14; Abdelmassih, Mary 2009, 'Two Christian Copts Detained for Third Time in Egypt', Assyrian International News Agency website, 21 May http://www.aina.org/news/20090521164145.htm – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 16).

On police action taken after the attack on the monastery began the EIPR reported:

> …Shots were fired at the monastery – some reports indicate that there was an exchange of gunfire, but the monks strenuously deny this – for at least four hours, after which security forces arrived to stop the assault (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2008, *Freedom of Religions and Belief in Egypt: Second Quarterly Report (April – June 2008)*, July, p.7 http://www.eipr.org/en/reports/FRB_quarterly_rep_jul08_en/Second%20quarterly%20Report%20on%20FRB.pdf – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 2).

The CSW also reported on the police's actions:

> Police arrived several hours after the attack began, despite the local station being located just 2km away. None of the alleged attackers from the local community have been detained by the police, despite being identified by the monks and known by both the police and the local community. Following the incident, rather than focusing on arresting the attackers and working on the release of those priests who had been kidnapped, police proceeded to interrogate each monk individually for approximately four hours (Christian Solidarity Worldwide 2008, *Egypt: Attack on Abu-Fana Monastery, El Minya*, September, pp.6-7 http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=report&id=101 – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 1).

Sources have also reported investigations by the NCHR, an unofficial committee appointed to resolve the land dispute and a committee set up by the Minya governor as well as reconciliation meetings into the Abu Fana monastery incident.

The CSW describes reconciliation meetings as follows:

> …'Reconciliation meetings' consist of religious leaders being brought together by the relevant government officials, following a sectarian incident to make peace. This usually takes place at the expense of the perpetrators of the crimes being brought to justice, essentially placing the perpetrators on an equal footing with the victims while bypassing the law (Christian Solidarity Worldwide 2008, *Egypt: Attack on Abu-Fana Monastery, El Minya*, September, p.7 http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=report&id=101 – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 1).

On the reconciliation meetings and the agreement reached by the unofficial committee the CSW reported:

> Following the 31 May attacks, the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Pope Shenouda III, initially refused to participate in any further reconciliation meetings until those responsible for the attacks were brought to justice. This stance was echoed by calls from the Coptic Ecclesiastical Council, However, following the intense media focus portraying the incident as a simple land dispute, Pope Shenouda finally entered into discussions with the unofficial committee appointed to settle the land dispute. A settlement was reached in late August in which the Coptic Orthodox Church gave up 25 acres of agricultural land and 70 acres of non-agricultural land, in return for permission to build a wall around the monastery and its remaining land.
>
> This outcome is concerning given that permission to build the wall was guaranteed within the terms agreed during the 2006 reconciliation meeting. There was significant disquiet over the partiality of this outcome; especially given the state's negligence in dealing with the violence inflicted on the monastery and its monks. CSW is especially concerned that the agreement may further prevent the likelihood of the perpetrators of violence being brought to justice.
>
> This initial agreement was subsequently challenged by the Bedouin population over the failure of the monastery to compensate for the death of Khalil Mohammed and for their stated involvement in the attack. Consequently, a new agreement was signed on 21 September 2008, where both the monks and the father of Khalil Mohammed agreed to all drop charges, resulting in the release of the 13 arrested Bedouins and Rifaat and Ibrahim Fawzi. However, at the time of writing, neither part as yet gone to the prosecutor's office to request that the charges be dropped, despite being scheduled to do so on 23 September 2008 (Christian Solidarity Worldwide 2008, *Egypt: Attack on Abu-Fana Monastery, El Minya*, September,

> pp.7-8 http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=report&id=101 – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 1).

The NCHR reportedly had sent a fact-finding commission to investigate the Abu Fana monastery incident. The *Al-Ahram Weekly Online* stated on the NCHR's report:

> The commission issued a report that outlined the dispute between Abu Fana's monks and Arab tribes residing close to the monastery, revealing also that extremist groups on both sides of the confessional divide (Muslims and Christians) are exploiting the incident and subsequent tensions. The hand of religion in daily life in the largely poor area is strong. The council's report called for the punishment of instigators and perpetrators, regardless of other considerations and in accordance to law.
>
> The report stressed that both state and society must take action to confront emerging sectarian tensions and related problems that cannot easily be solved through reconciliatory meetings or security solutions that have proven failures in the past. The pre-eminence of law and the means of enforcing it are paramount, underlined the report (Leila, Reem 2008, 'Abu Fana in focus', *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, Issue No. 907, 24-30 July http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/907/eg2.htm – Accessed 27 October 2009 – Attachment 17).

An *Al-Ahram Weekly Online* news article, dated 3-9 July 2008, stated in respect of the committee set up by the Minya governor:

> Minya Governor Ahmed Diaaeddin set up a committee to determine the legal and archaeological claims of the monastery. The committee subsequently issued a report which has been ratified by Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif. Based on decree 212 for the year 2002, issued by the Ministry of Culture and the Supreme Council for Antiquities (SCA), the report recommended that any wall surrounding the monastery include only the original archaeological site. The committee also acted to prevent the construction of any additional cells for hermits, many of which lie more than 3km from the site of the monastery. Protecting existing cells, the committee concluded, was the responsibility of whoever constructed them and not of the government. The report also identified disputed land surrounding the monastery as government property. Already cultivated lands are to be returned to the government (Leila, Reem 2008, 'Back to the wall', *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, Issue No: 904, 3-9 July http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/904/eg8.htm – Accessed 27 October 2009 – Attachment 11).

The *Al-Ahram Weekly Online* also reported that the Minya governor had "insisted" that he was "not presiding over a reconciliation meeting". Pope Shenouda III reportedly told the monks to ignore the committee report and not deal with the governor's decisions (Leila, Reem 2008, 'Back to the wall', *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, Issue No: 904, 3-9 July http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/904/eg8.htm – Accessed 27 October 2009 – Attachment 11).

Attack on 20 April 2008

The EIPR reported an attack on Coptic worshippers on 20 April 2008 in Qasr Hur village, next to the Abu Fana monastery:

> 11. On 20 April 2008, in the village of Qasr Hur, located next to the Abu Fana Monastery in Mallawi, worshippers coming out of the village church, the Abu Fana Church, were attacked with canes. According to statements given to EIPR researchers by the victims and eyewitnesses, the attack began when a Muslim youth ran his bicycle into a Christian woman

on her way to church on Sunday, sparking a dispute that developed into an assault on the worshippers, five of whom were lightly injured. The victims and their lawyers said that they had filed a complaint with the Mallawi police while some Muslims in the village filed a counter-complaint accusing the worshippers of assaulting them. The injured with whom EIPR researchers spoke said that they were pressured by the police and the church priest to withdraw the complaint and seek reconciliation, which they did the day after the incident (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2008, *Freedom of Religions and Belief in Egypt: Second Quarterly Report (April – June 2008)*, July, p.9 http://www.eipr.org/en/reports/FRB_quarterly_rep_jul08_en/Second%20quarterly%20Report%20on%20FRB.pdf – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 2).

Attack on 9 January 2008

An April 2008 EIPR report states that about 20 people attacked the Abu Fana monastery on 9 January 2008. According to the report, after the attack the Minya governor, responding to the monastery priests requests, ordered a wall to be constructed around the monastery:

> 10. On 9 January 2008, approximately 20 people attacked the Abu Fana Orthodox Coptic monastery, located in the Mallawi district of Minya. According to monastery officials, eight monks' cells were vandalized during the attack. The witnesses who talked to EIPR researchers all stated that the assault was not primarily motivated by religious prejudice. The perpetrators are allegedly individuals who have habitually tried to extort monastery officials for money in exchange for protection.
>
> Attorney Mamdouh Ramzi, who visited the monastery after the incident, told the EIPR that he saw the monks' cells that had been completely burned up as a result of the attack. He also saw criminal forensic specialists appointed by the Mallawi prosecutor's office sent to collect bullets and identify the materials used in the attack. One of the monks at the monastery told the EIPR that during the same assault a priest had been shot at while riding a tractor and was injured in the hand by shrapnel from the tractor. He added that monastery officials had filed a police report immediately after the attack. It was transferred to the prosecutor's office, but as of early April, no one had been arrested or charged in the incident.
>
> According to monastery officials, in response to requests from monastery priests, the governor of Minya ordered an external wall built around the monastery immediately after the assault to protect it from similar incidents in the future. As of the writing of this report, local officials had planned the wall and surveyed the area, but construction had not yet begun (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights 2008, *Freedom of Religion and Belief in the First Quarter of 2008 (January – March 2008)*, April, para. 10 http://www.eipr.org/en/reports/FRB_quarterly_rep_apr08_en/2904.htm – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 18).

Attacks in 2006

The September 2008 CSW report mentioned that there were "many attacks in 2006" and referred to subsequent "reconciliation meetings":

> Following one of many attacks in 2006, official papers were drawn up and signed by both parties during one of several post-attack 'reconciliation meetings'. 'Reconciliation meetings' consist of religious leaders being brought together by the relevant government officials, following a sectarian incident to make peace. This usually takes place at the expense of the perpetrators of the crimes being brought to justice, essentially placing the perpetrators on an equal footing with the victims while bypassing the law.

> During the meeting, the Bedouins admitted to attacking the monastery and monks, and made a pledge not to attack it again. This was reinforced with the condition of a 500,000LE fine that would be payable following any future attacks. Furthermore, the Bedouins pledged to help construct the disputed wall. This meeting was attended by the mayor and a number of high ranking local police officials. Despite being publicised in some Egyptian media since the last incident, none of the terms of this agreement have been honoured (Christian Solidarity Worldwide 2008, *Egypt: Attack on Abu-Fana Monastery, El Minya*, September, p.7 http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=report&id=101 – Accessed 28 October 2009 – Attachment 1).

In June 2008, following the May attack, *Al-Ahram Weekly Online* cited Pope Shenouda on the 2006 attacks:

> In 2006, Pope Shenouda continued, a similar attack took place. A formal reconciliation was reached between the monks and their neighbours who agreed that the land belonged to the Abu Fana Monastery and promised to help build a fence around it. "Yet despite these promises clashes continue to happen with the most recent ones involving live ammunition." (Leila, Reem 2008, 'Fearful signs', *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, Issue No. 901, 12-18 June http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/901/eg6.htm – Accessed 29 October 2009 – Attachment 4).

3. Deleted.

4. Is it common for Coptic families not to report kidnappings of their daughters/sisters for fear of embarrassment and losing face?

No information was found in the sources consulted on Coptic families failing to report the kidnapping of their daughters/sisters for fear of embarrassment and losing face. One article suggests that families will say that their daughters/sisters have been kidnapped to save face.

A January 2007 article sourced from the Women's E-news website addresses the issue of the alleged "kidnapping" of Coptic women by Muslims, claiming that many such cases are triggered by lack of access to divorce for Coptic women. The article quotes a young Coptic woman that "many more women will leave and their families will continue to say they are kidnapped just to save face". The article states:

> Some Coptic families have alleged that the women were kidnapped by Muslim men and forced to undergo conversion to Islam.
>
> But some women's rights advocates here argue that these are not kidnappings. More often, they see these cases as cries for help by young women in the socially conservative Coptic community, which traces its church to the first century when, by traditional belief, the apostle Mark founded it in Egypt as the first Christian church in history.
>
> In particular, rights activists say the missing young women draw attention to customs among traditional Copts, particularly the lack of access to divorce and the practice of arranged marriages.
> …
> Laura, a Coptic woman in her mid-20s living in Alexandria who asked that her surname not be used, agreed. She said that while a few of the kidnappings may be authentic, most of the media reports are based on fabrications made by the families to disguise their daughters' dissatisfactions.
> …
> **'Saving Face' Over Disappearances**

> "Look at almost every other Christian church on the planet," says Laura. "They have had some sort of reformation and changed many of the 'natural' roles of women throughout the past thousand years, so why is the Coptic Church still living in the past? If they don't begin to change then I believe that many more women will leave and their families will continue to say they are kidnapped just to save face." (Mayton, Joseph 2007, 'Missing Coptic Women May Send Distress Signals', Women's E-news website, 2 January http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/3051/context/archive – Accessed 19 August 2008 – Attachment 22).

It may be of some interest that the US State Department in its *International Religious Freedom Report 2009* stated that there have been claims of forced conversion of Coptic women to Islam which involved kidnapping. It was stated that such forced conversions have not been independently verified in recent years:

> As in previous years, there were occasional claims of Muslim men forcing Coptic women and girls to convert to Islam. Reports of such cases were disputed and often included inflammatory allegations and categorical denials of kidnapping and rape. Observers, including human rights groups, found it extremely difficult to determine whether compulsion was used, as most cases involved a female Copt who converted to Islam when she married a Muslim male. Reports of such cases almost never appear in the local media. In recent years, there have been no independently verified claims of forced conversions of this nature (US Department of State 2009, 'Forced Religious Conversion' in *International Religious Freedom Report 2009 – Egypt*, 26 October – Attachment 14).

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