

## Christian teen jailed for insulting Islam with Facebook cartoon in Egypt

Country/Region: Middle East and North Africa, Egypt, Africa

A Christian teenager has been jailed for three years in Egypt for posting cartoons deemed insulting to Islam on his Facebook page.

Gamal Abdou Massoud (17) was also accused of distributing some of the images to his school friends. He was sentenced on 4 April by a child's court in the southern city of Assiut, where he lives.



Human rights lawyer Negad al-Borai said that the jail term was the maximum penalty under Egyptian law for such an offence.

The cartoon, published in December, was regarded by Muslims as a depiction of Muhammad, though Gamal denied this. It nevertheless prompted violent protests by Muslims in three villages that lasted for two days. They torched Gamal's home and four others belonging to his friends and relatives. Several Christians were injured in the violence.

At a meeting held on 31 December involving religious leaders, including Salafists, and the local authorities, Gamal was accused of sedition and detained, while his family was evicted from the village. It was also decided that church leaders in the area had to publish an official apology in the media.

Gamal's plight follows a number of other cases brought against Christians and secularists for blasphemy in recent months, heightening concerns that freedom of expression is being stifled in the post-revolution Egyptian order.

Last month, Makram Diab was jailed for six years, double the maximum sentence, for "insulting" Muhammad following a dispute with a Muslim colleague. An appeal hearing scheduled for 15 March was prevented from going ahead by over 300 Muslim lawyers who blocked Makram's defence team from entering the court.

A 23-year-old Christian, Ayman Youssef Mansour, was sentenced to three years in prison in November 2011 for comments he wrote on his Facebook page that were considered derogatory to Islam.

Lawsuits brought against high-profile Christian businessman and liberal political leader Naguib Sawaris were, however, thrown out of court. He had been charged with "blasphemy and insulting Islam" for an image he tweeted last June depicting Mickey and Minnie Mouse in Islamic guise, with a long beard and face veil respectively.

Egyptian Christians have expressed anger and frustration at the double standards applied regarding the country's "contempt of religion" law.

Dr Naguib Gobrail, head of the Egyptian Union of Human Rights Organisations, said that he and other lawyers have filed several complaints to the Attorney General against Muslims for alleged contempt of Christianity but none has been taken up. He said:

"[Christians] have received a barrage of insults to their faith and their symbols and have had churches torched and destroyed, and no one has done anything about it."