

Muslim gang leader accused of terrorising Christian villagers in Egypt

Country/Region: Egypt, Middle East and North Africa

A Muslim gang leader has been accused of terrorising Christians in two Egyptian villages, attacking homes, extorting money, raping women and kidnapping children for ransom.

Numerous complaints have been made to the Attorney General in Cairo about the man, who cannot be named for legal reasons; he has allegedly been targeting Christian families in the Upper Egyptian villages of Badraman and Nazlet Badraman in Deir Mawas, Minya, since the end of January.

Ten human rights organisations staged a rally in front of the Attorney General's office on 30 March to publicise the matter. One activist, who has been registering all crimes against the villagers, said:

[He] has set himself up as governor of the two villages despite the presence of two village mayors. He is practising injustice and tyranny only against the [Christians] in the villages. He walks between Christian homes, carrying a weapon on his shoulder, followed by his brothers and cousins and more than 50 armed thugs from outside the villages.



Coptic villagers of Badraman
Image Source: www.aina.org

There are around 9,000 Christians in the two villages; they have been living in fear for more than two months. The first alleged incident happened on 28 January when a Christian family was assaulted by the accused. The victim reported the attack to the police but was forced to drop the charges after being threatened with death by the offender and his gang.

The following day, the home of another Christian man was allegedly broken into, his wife and mother raped by the accused. Further incidents are said to have involved the kidnap and ransom of Christian children. Many Christian families have left the villages as a result of the apparent campaign against them, which has also involved looting, crop destruction and a curfew.

The matter came to a head with the protest at the end of March, after which the accused allegedly forced 23 villagers to go with him to the Attorney General's office to withdraw the complaints they had made against him. But when they arrived, the offices were closed.

The following morning, 3 April, police and army forces came to arrest the suspect and his gang, but he had been tipped off and, along with most of his gang, had fled. They later returned, and assaults against Christian villagers are said to have continued to force the army to release gang members who were detained. A further rally was due to take place on 6 April.

Christians in Egypt are frequently victims of violence and oppression, a sad fact that does not appear likely to change as the country moves from dictatorship to democracy.