

12 EGY 5 - 12-08-01 Dahshour

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<http://www.afrik.com/article26391.html>

Egypte : nouveaux heurts entre musulmans et coptes

vendredi 27 juillet 2012 / par Assanatou Baldé



Des affrontements ont éclaté entre musulmans et chrétiens coptes dans un village proche du Caire. Des maisons d'Égyptiens coptes ont été brûlées. Les heurts entre des membres des deux communautés religieuses sont fréquents en Égypte ces dernières années.

Regain de tension entre coptes et musulmans. Des heurts ont éclaté entre des membres des deux communautés dans un village proche du Caire, faisant au moins un blessé. À l'origine de cette confrontation, une dispute entre un musulman et un blanchisseur chrétien qui avait brûlé sa chemise en la repassant.

Les affrontements entre coptes et musulmans ne sont pas rares en Égypte. Les coptes représenteraient, selon les estimations, 10% de la population égyptienne, soit entre 7 et 8 millions de personnes. Ces dernières années, ils ont été, à plusieurs reprises, victimes

d'attaques meurtrières. En octobre 2011, 17 manifestants coptes avaient été tués lors d'affrontements avec les forces de l'ordre durant une marche de protestation contre l'attaque d'une Eglise par des islamistes radicaux dans la province d'Assouan.

« Les coptes réclament des droits égaux pour tous »

Selon Christine Chaillot, écrivain spécialiste des chrétiens du Moyen-Orient, contactée par *Afrik.com*, « les coptes souhaitent simplement manifester leur existence en tant que minorité et en tant que citoyens égyptiens. Ils demandent des droits égaux pour tous, musulmans et chrétiens. »

Lors de l'élection présidentielle égyptienne, les coptes ont exprimé leurs inquiétudes pour leur avenir si les islamistes accédaient à la tête du pays. Ils ont d'ailleurs voté en masse pour Ahmed Chafik, l'ancien ministre d'Hosni Moubarak. Le président égyptien, le Frère musulman Mohamed Morsi, s'est, quant à lui, engagé à respecter les droits des coptes et promis d'en nommer dans son gouvernement. Les coptes sont en effet peu représentés dans la institutions politiques égyptiennes.

<http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2012/07/27/97001-20120727FILWWW00551-egypte-des-maisons-chretiennes-brulees.php>

Egypte: des maisons chrétiennes brûlées

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Des Egyptiens musulmans ont incendié des habitations de chrétiens coptes dans un village proche du Caire, après une dispute entre un musulman et un blanchisseur chrétien qui avait brûlé sa chemise en la repassant

Ces affrontements, au cours desquels musulmans et Coptes ont lancé des cocktails Molotov, ont fait au moins un blessé, ont précisé des responsables de la police.

Selon les estimations, les Coptes représentent 6 à 10% des quelque 82 millions d'Egyptiens. Ils s'estiment victimes de discriminations et ont été visés par plusieurs attaques meurtrières ces dernières années.

En janvier 2010, un attentat à la sortie d'une messe de Noël en Haute-Egypte avait tué six Coptes, ainsi qu'un garde musulman. Et un an plus tard, la nuit du nouvel An avait été ensanglantée par un attentat contre une église d'Alexandrie (nord), qui avait fait une vingtaine de morts.

Des musulmans ont aussi incendié à plusieurs reprises des maisons de Coptes au cours de heurts confessionnels meurtriers. Le nouveau président élu en juin, l'islamiste Mohamed Morsi, s'est engagé à respecter les droits des Coptes et promis d'en nommer dans son gouvernement.

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16 wounded in sectarian clashes outside Cairo



An Egyptian riot policeman stands guard in 2011 at the spot where Coptic Christians came under attack by assailants throwing stones and bottles. Angry Muslims attacked a church and Christian homes outside Cairo on Wednesday, sparking clashes that wounded 16 people, a security official said, after a Muslim died of wounds from a fight with a Christian.

AFP - Angry Muslims attacked a church and Christian homes outside Cairo on Wednesday, sparking clashes that wounded 16 people, a security official said, after a Muslim died of wounds from a fight with a Christian.

Police fired tear gas to prevent the mob setting fire to the church but the crowd returned and torched several homes in the village of Dahshur as well as three police cars, the official said.

Six villagers and 10 police were wounded in the violence.

It was the second assault on the village following last week's fight between the Muslim and the Christian, a laundry worker whom he accused of singing his shirt while ironing it.

On Friday, Muslims set fire to several homes and traded fire bombs with villagers, leaving at least one person wounded.

The Muslim died of his injuries on Tuesday and was buried during the night.

Muslims have in the past burned the homes of Copts during sectarian clashes, with dozens of Christians killed in the past 18 months alone since president Hosni Mubarak's overthrow in a popular uprising.

The Copts, who make up roughly 10 percent of Egypt's 82-million-strong population, were also the target of sectarian attack before Mubarak's ouster in February last year.

Mubarak's overthrow was followed by this year's election of Islamist president, Mohammed Morsi, who has pledged to respect the rights of Christians and says they will be represented in his government.

Muslim-majority Egypt has for decades been marked by deep sectarian tensions, with religious violence between Muslims and Christians often sparked by disputes over land or love affairs between members of the two communities.

In January 2011, a suicide bomber killed more than 20 Christians outside a church in the country's second city Alexandria, amid accusations by Islamists that the Coptic Church had detained a woman who converted to Islam.

The United States warned on Monday that despite gestures by Egypt's interim military leaders towards greater inclusiveness, sectarian tensions and violence had increased.

Washington's 2011 International Religious Freedom Report expressed concern over "both the Egyptian government's failure to curb rising violence against Coptic Christians and its involvement in violent attacks."

http://www.denverpost.com/breakingnews/ci_21236474/riot-leaves-an-egyptian-village-without-christians

Riot leaves an Egyptian village without Christians

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Updated: 08/04/2012 01:38:10 PM MDT

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press



In this Thursday, Aug. 2, 2012 photograph, Egyptian Christian Sameeha... ((AP Photo/Amr Nabil))

DAHSHOUR, Egypt—When the angry mob was rampaging through town, storming her home and those of other Christians, the 70-year-old woman hid in her cow pen, pushing a rock against the door. There she covered for hours, at one point passing out from tear gas being fired by police that seeped in.

When Sameeha Wehba emerged just before dawn, she found she was the only Christian left in this small Egyptian village just south of Cairo.

Dahshour's entire Christian community—as many as 100 families some estimate—fled to nearby towns in the violence earlier this week. The flock's priest, cloaked in a white sheet to hide him, was taken out in a police van. At least 16 homes and properties of Christians were pillaged and some torched and a church damaged.

The violence was ultimately rooted in a dispute over a badly ironed shirt that escalated into a fight in which a Christian burned a Muslim to death, in turn sparking the rampage by angry Muslims.

"It was a devil's moment," Wehba said Thursday at the home of her Muslim neighbors, who have taken her in. "Whoever caused this was the devil's son."

The unprecedented exodus underscores how sectarian divisions that festered under decades of Hosni Mubarak's rule are taking a turn to the worse, complicated by the problems of post-revolution Egypt, a country where 10 percent of the population are Christian.

Police forces have been weakened and often don't carry out their duties. Islamists have been emboldened, with rhetoric fanning hatreds. In an atmosphere of lawlessness, Muslims and Christians alike feel freer in unleashing prejudices that in the past were kept barely under the surface.

Most notably in Dahshour, police did nothing as tensions spiraled following the burning of the Muslim man late last month.

While the man clung to life for several days, Muslim residents openly threatened to retaliate against all Christians. When the Muslim died Tuesday, the only solution from police was to encourage or assist in removing the Christian population before the violence erupted that night, Christians say. During the rampage, security forces acted to stop the crowd from storming the church, firing tear gas.

"What is grave this time is that violence was not only expected but preventable, and security forces failed to prevent it even though they had prior knowledge," said Hossam Bahgat, head of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, which monitors sectarian violence.

In the past, incidents of sectarian violence in Egyptian towns often took a routine course. A local spat between a Muslim and Christian would escalate, and if a death occurred, violence would be sparked. Police would often see a bit of unrest as a way to let off steam but then negotiate a compromise solution over the death. Officials would deny any sectarian nature to the conflict.

In recent years, there have been cases where a whole Christian family was ordered by authorities to leave their hometown to prevent retaliation. At the same time, Christians have become more ready to use violence as a preventive measure when they fear they will be attacked, Bahgat said.

But uniquely in Dahshour, angry Muslims treated the entire Christian community as the family of the accused killer and subject to retaliation.

"Collective retribution is the most dangerous and most likely (form of violence) to spread over time ... beyond the site of violence," Bahgat said.

Egypt's new president, Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, didn't comment on the violence for several days. On Friday, he appealed to Dahshour's Christians to return home, promising justice against perpetrators of the violence. But, echoing the line that Mubarak's government always took for Muslim-Christian violence, he denied the incident was sectarian.

"This was an individual incident and its origin is not about Muslims and Christians, and it happens every day. It was blown out of proportion," he said. Morsi's spokesman denied the eviction was forced.

The village of 15,000 is tucked between several of Egypt's most stunning ancient pyramids and surrounded by picturesque palm groves. Security trucks are now deployed on its winding, unpaved narrow roads to guard the church and empty Christian properties.

Many in the village say the Christians should not be allowed to return until the Christian laundry worker who set fire to the Muslim is killed. Some residents take an even harder line and say they shouldn't be let back at all.

The sentiments were on display even in the neighboring Muslim family that took in Wehba to protect her in case of further reprisals.

Um Mohammed, the 65-year old matron of the household whose son was a friend of the slain man, says Christians can come back, but only if justice is served against the killer. "He burned my heart. He must also be burned. It is retribution," she said.

"No Christian will return to this village again!" someone shouted from behind Umm Mohammed. It came from a little girl wearing a strict version of the Islamic headscarf, covering her head and much of her torso. The girl—apparently the child of a neighbor—was quickly shushed and hustled out of the room by the family.

"We didn't kick them out for nothing," said Ali el-Gizawy, a 47-year old government employee. "They betrayed our trust, and they will not be allowed to return."

The Christians feel a mix of frustration at the incompetence of authorities, a sense of injustice and a fear their fate may be irreversible.

Kirollos Shehata, a 22-year old Coptic Christian resident, said he hadn't wanted to leave but finally did as his Muslim neighbors and his own departing family members urged him to go with the others to avoid more violence.

"Now I can't imagine going back," he said. For him, it's not fear of violence but a sense that the Christians humiliated themselves by leaving. "How would we look to the rest of the community and how will people treat us?" He spoke on condition his current location is not revealed.

The dispute began when the laundry man, Sameh, burned the shirt of his Muslim client, setting off an argument first with the client's wife and then with the client himself, according to several residents. The argument turned violent. On July 26, an angry crowd gathered outside Sameh's home, and he and his family lobbed firebombs down on them from his roof.

One man in the crowd, 27-year-old Moez Mohammed, was set aflame and was hospitalized with severe burns.

The next two days, Mohammed's brothers and friends went down the village's main Christian street, waving firebombs and threatening violence, Shehata said. When one Christian countered that the whole community was not to blame, a fight broke out, until it was broken up by neighbors.

"They said if you don't leave the village, you will all die," Shehata recalled. Aside from the anger over the young man's death, there was economic jealousy because local Christians are

seen as better off, he said. Moreover, some Islamists used the occasion to ignite deep-seated biases against Christians and their local priest and settle scores.

Among the Muslims, stories of Mohammed's death circulated and grew more gruesome in the retelling.

"His eyes were on fire," said a young boy in the house where Wehba was a guest. "He ran like a ball of fire," said the boy's grandmother. Another described his skin melting. Some said Mohammed had tried to break up the fight between Sameh and his client over the shirt; other said saved a little girl from the fire before he caught flame himself.

Meanwhile, Christian families began sending women and children out of the village, Shehata said.

When Mohammed died on Tuesday, those still there left and police escorted the priest out. After Mohammed's burial in the evening, hundreds of Muslims began attacking the homes Christians left behind and tried to storm the church, located inside the priest's house.

Wehba, the elderly woman who lives alone in her family home, was forgotten in the confusion.

"She is like one of us," said Umm Mohammed, her host, adding that she sleeps next to Wehba to reassure her. "She has no one. And she has nothing to do with it."