



Egyptian Police Obstruct Search for Missing Christian Woman

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Three months after his 20-year-old daughter disappeared while on an errand from work, Coptic Christian Rezk Shafik Attallah remains convinced that she has been kidnapped by a former police constable. Attallah said his daughter, Marianna Rezk Shafik Attallah, left work May 30 at the Al-Ra'ay medical laboratory in El-Fayoum, 60 miles south of Cairo, to pick up a patient's blood sample from a residential address. Neither her family nor her fiancé have heard from her since. When she failed to return home, her fiancé, Bishoy Hosni, went searching for her at her workplace. Mohammed Salah No'man, owner of the No'man Computer Center neighboring the Al-Ra'ay lab, told him that a Muslim employee of his, Ali Mahmoud Abdel Rasoul, had kidnapped the young woman.

Reportedly Rasoul, who had been maintaining the Al-Ra'ay laboratory computers, had previously been fired from the police force for "bad behavior."

Police Obstruction

After hearing this, Attallah filed a report with the police on the day of his daughter's disappearance, naming Rasoul as her suspected kidnapper. But the officials on duty refused to give him the case number. At the same time, a State Security Investigation (SSI) officer declared that Rasoul had packed up his household goods and moved 250 miles further south to Sohag, taking Attallah's daughter with him. But he warned the young woman's father and fiancé to stop looking for her, declaring she had left of her own free will.

The woman's fiancé remained skeptical. "If she went of her own free will," Hosni told Compass, "then why didn't she come to say that [to us]?" Soon afterwards, rumors spread in their district of El-Fayoum that Marianna Attallah had left her Christian faith and converted to Islam. But Hosni dismissed the claims, saying that during their courtship, it had been her close relationship with God and active involvement in the church that had helped bring him to a deeper understanding of his Christian faith. Employer Involvement in Abduction

It also became evident to him that Marianna Attallah's employer, a Coptic woman named Ivon Asa'ad was involved somehow in the young woman's disappearance.

A graduate of a local school of commerce, Marianna Attallah had taken a job at the lab on March 15, her meager salary of 90 Egyptian pounds (\$15) per month supplementing her father's limited income as a tailor. But the young woman's parents realized that something at work was disturbing her, causing her to spend long hours alone crying. So despite their financial straits to provide for her and her four siblings, they encouraged Marianna Attallah to quit her job. Relieved, she resigned on May 28. The next day Asa'ad visited her at the family's house, offering to more than double her salary if she would return.

The offer was too good to turn down, and she returned to the lab on May 30. But when Hosni later telephoned Asa'ad, questioning the circumstances of his fiancée's errand and disappearance, within an hour police summoned him and the young woman's father.

"Why did you call Miss Ivon?" the SSI officer asked them. "Don't call her again. Marianna was not kidnapped. She went of her free will." Cruel Joke on Desperate Father

The SSI has continued to stonewall the Attallah family's attempts to recover their daughter. On August 11, a security officer called the father, suggesting that he buy a cell phone so that the police could contact him whenever they learned his daughter's whereabouts.

Attallah scraped together enough money to buy the phone and gave the police his number. Soon afterwards the officer called, telling him that his daughter was in Alexandria and promising that if he went to meet her, he could bring her back home.

Burning with hope, the father traveled the 200 miles north to Alexandria, where the officer called him again. "Your daughter is across the street from you," he was told.

Spotting a veiled woman, the father approached and tried to speak with her, but she ran away from him and got on a bus. When he followed and tried again to speak with her, other passengers thought he was harassing the woman and started beating him, finally forcing him to get off the bus.

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"They are enjoying torturing that poor father," commented a human rights activist who interviewed Attallah in late August.

Although Attallah sent faxed petitions about his daughter's case to the interior minister, SSI headquarters in El-Fayoum and Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenoudah III, he has received no reply.

Hundreds of young Coptic women disappear and are reported kidnapped each year in Egypt, but their families' claims are difficult to prove.

At the same time, security officials frequently prevent Christian parents from having contact or private access to their daughters once they have been located, instead leaving them in the custody of the Muslim "protector" who abducted them.

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