



Egyptian Security Refuses to Return Abducted Christian Coptic Girl

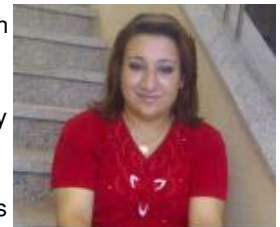
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(AINA) -- Two incidents of abduction of Coptic girls to force them to convert to Islam took place within one week in Upper Egypt. In both cases the Egyptian security predictably played a key role in the outcome of the cases.

Rania Asaad was returned to her family, while Irene Labib is still missing, in spite of pleas from human rights organizations to the security authorities to end this Coptic family's misfortune.

In view of the security authorities' complete neglect in the handling of Irene's case, and false government media reports that Irene was returned to her family, a spokesman for the Coptic Church's Sohag Diocese issued a statement on 7/16/09 calling for the immediate return of the abducted girl.

Irene Hanna Labib, 20-years old, disappeared on 7/1/2009 from Sahel Tahta, Sohag Governorate, 500 km south of Cairo.



Irene Hanna Labib

After carrying out their own investigations, the well to do Labib family discovered that Irene was abducted by Muslim Hisham Saad Mohamed, who works as a waiter in the IT institute where she studies.

"Her brother Girgis Labib went and met with the abductor Hisham, who confessed to Irene being in his possession," said Reverend Sawires Rady pastor of St. Shenouda Church, Sahel Tahta in Sohag. "The Labib family filed a report with the police and accused Hisham Mohamaed of abducting their daughter. The police detained Hisham and Irene's brother Girgis, who was subsequently released after taking a pledge not to harass Hisham." Hisham was released three days later after promising security to bring back Irene at 8 pm of the same day, but he has subsequently disappeared. Reverend Sawires said "the abductor never kept his promise and I now ask security to bring back the abducted girl as they know her whereabouts."

Mamdouh Nakhla, head of Al Kalema Human Right Organisation told Copts United "Security must disclose the whereabouts of the girl kidnapped by the Muslim man, as they know her whereabouts from the confessions of the abductor who pledged to bring her back on the same day." Nakhla holds security responsible for bringing the girl back to her family safe and unharmed. Also the Bareek Center for Anti-Violence Against Women Advocacy criticized the role of security. Until her return, the Labib family is keeping quiet about the circumstances of their daughter's disappearance.

The family of 21-year old pharmacy student Rania Tawfik Asaad from Samalut, Minya Governorate, were successful in getting back their daughter, one week she disappeared on 6/27/2009; she was held by her abductor in the small village Of Taha Bosh, Nasser district, in the Beni Suef Governorate.



Rania Asaad

Rania was approached by Muslim army officer Mohamed Sayed Farag, 29 years old, who posed as a Copt called Mina who was living in Cairo. After a brief courtship, the army officer proposed to her and asked her to meet his elderly mother. According to Ayman Eid of Free Copts advocacy Rania knew the true identity of her abductor only when she arrived at a secluded house in Beni Suef.

Mohamed was also discovered to be a member of the Islamic Welfare Association, which is affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood. He asked Rania to convert to Islam and marry him, but she refused. After a great ordeal her family discovered her whereabouts and learnt that she was forced to convert to Islam by the Association and married Captain Mohamed two days after her abduction.

Her father reported the incident to security and accused the army officer of abducting his daughter. According to an eyewitness who asked to remain anonymous, the State Security had made a deal with Rania's father to bring her back on condition of dropping all charges against the army officer, as he would be subjected to trial by the armed forces and due to the negative publicity to the reputation of the Defence Ministry, in return for his daughter's safe return.

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The issue of abduction of Coptic girls forms one of the most explosive problems in the relations between Christians and Muslims of Egypt -- especially as abductions are carried out in cooperation between Arab-funded legitimate associations and the State Security.

In the opinion of Magdy Khalil, political analyst and researcher that abduction of Coptic girls is an organized crime. "Abducting and converting Coptic girls to Islam is not only a result of the paranoid and racist incitation against the Copts, it is an organized and pre-planned process by associations and organizations inside Egypt with domestic and Arab funding, as the main role in seducing and luring Coptic girls is carried through cunning, deceit, and enticement, or through force if required," he said.

Khalil tells of incidents of abduction he witnessed when the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and Pope Shenouda intervened, and where the abducted girls were returned to their families within 24 hours. "What can we call this? And what about the poor ones whose voice could not be heard, or have no connections?" he said.

Activist Medhat Kelada, PR for Copts United advocacy believes that the Islamization business represents a permanent source of livelihood for security officials, "Especially with the flow of funds from the rich and extremist Wahhabis who try to Islamize the Egyptian Copts with the help of some of the security service officers", he said.

The Egyptian Al Fagr (the Dawn) independent newspaper was the first to report on the lucrative business of the 'brokers' of Islamization of Christians, in its May 19th 2008 issue, taking the city of Alexandria as an example.

Al Fagr reporter Tamer Salah-el-Din highlighted how the operation which is funded by Muslim businessmen is carried out with the collusion of State Security and Mosque sheikhs. The 'trading rates' cashed by brokers for each Christian male and female conversion to Islam, at the time of writing his report, was 7000 Egyptian pounds for the male and 6000 for the female. The rates for Coptic girls fluctuate depending on how good-looking she is and her family's social status.

Coptic Pope Shenouda III openly protested on December 17th, 1976 about this problem and in spite of the multiplicity of incidents, not one single person accused of abduction of Coptic girls was brought to justice.

"Amid the government's inaction and its collusion, awakening the international conscience may be the more effective means in exposing the perpetrators and those who support them." says Khalil.

By Mary Abdelmassih

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