

Mourners Protest Islamic Attacks on Copts in Egypt

✖ A funeral for a Coptic Christian gruesomely killed on a village street north of Cairo by a Muslim assailant last week turned into a protest by hundreds of demonstrators in Egypt.

Galal Nasr el-Dardiri, 35, attacked 63-year-old Abdu Georgy in front of the victim's shop in Behnay village the afternoon of Sept. 16, according to research by a local journalist. Other Copts watched in horror as El-Dardiri stabbed Georgy five times in the back, according to interviews by Gamal Gerges, a reporter for newspaper *Al-Youm al-Sabeh*.

As Georgy fell to the ground, El-Dardiri took his knife and stabbed him four times in the stomach. He then disemboweled him, slit his throat and began sawing off his head, according to Gerges. The Rev. Stephanos Aazer, a Coptic priest who knew Georgy and saw photographs of his mutilated body, said the victim's head was attached to the body by a small piece of flesh.

After killing Georgy, El-Dardiri got on a motorcycle and rode 30 minutes to another town, where he found Coptic shopkeeper Boils Eid Messiha, 40, and stabbed him twice in the stomach, according to Gerges. El-Dardiri immediately left the scene, went to nearby Mit Afif and allegedly attacked Hany Barsom Soliman. Soliman, a Copt in his mid-20s, managed to fight him off.

Messiha was taken to a hospital where he has been operated on at least five times. He remained in intensive care at press time. Soliman suffered lacerations to his arms but was otherwise unharmed.

On Sept. 17, about 1,000 people gathered at Georgy's funeral

to protest the killing and assaults on Coptic Christians. Protestors chanted that Georgy's "blood was not [spilled] in vain" as they carried signs that read, "Where are you, government? The terrorists are going to kill us."

Aazer and several other priests participated in the demonstration. Aazer, of the Behnay area, confirmed that police had been monitoring local Copts and even tracking telephone conversations of clergy.

El-Dardiri was arrested on Sept. 17 in Cairo and has been charged with murder. It was unclear when he would appear in court.

Ibrahim Habib, chairman of United Copts Great Britain, said Egypt has encouraged the type of "radicalization" that has led to such attacks.

"It is the Egyptian government's responsibility now to stop the persecution and victimization of its Coptic minority by Islamic fundamentalists," he said. "The persecution and victimization of the Christians in Egypt has been persistent for three decades and recently escalated to a worrying tempo."

Habib added that Egypt needs to root out Islamic extremists from government agencies, "including the Egyptian police, which frequently show complacency or collusion with the Islamists against the peaceful Christians."