

Christian Sentenced to Prison for 'Insulting Islam' on Facebook

An Egyptian court has sentenced a Coptic Christian to three years in prison after he was found guilty of "insulting Islam in the first degree".

Abdo Adel, 43, from Menbal, a village in Egypt's Minya governorate, 200km south of Cairo, was accused in July of publishing a post on his Facebook page that insulted Islam, as World Watch Monitor reported.

In his post, Adel had compared Islam's prophet, Muhammad, with Jesus. Muslim villagers filed a complaint with police in the nearby city of Matai and Adel was arrested on July 6 on charges of insulting Muhammad and contempt of Islam. He was detained and his lawyer told World Watch Monitor at the time that if found guilty, he could receive a sentence of up to five years in prison.

Following his arrest, a mob attacked houses owned by Copts and the situation has remained tense ever since, according to Washington-based International Christian Concern, which suggested the judge may have handed down the sentence, which Adel will appeal, in the hope of restoring calm in the village.

"[I] was expecting this to happen in the first degree. But what I hope is that he will be freed in the appeal," a close relative of Adel's told ICC.

A lawyer familiar with the case said: "Usually the judge gives the maximum penalty in the first degree to secure himself that he applied the law, knowing that the other judge in the second degree will reduce or set him free." Adel's appeal is expected

to be heard at the end of this month.

Regional security forces had to be deployed to restore order, as the attack left the Coptic community holed up in their houses, fearing for their lives, as World Watch Monitor reported.

Most of the 90 Muslims arrested following the riots—on charges of mobbing, attacking Coptic homes, inciting sedition and attacking the police—were released after a “community reconciliation session” at the end of July.

At the time, one of Adel’s relatives told World Watch Monitor: “Abdo is a simple man. He works in making the church’s bread [for use during Mass]. He is a very humble man and he is loved by all the church members. He is not good at reading and writing, and he is not good at dealing with his Facebook page in the best way, which put him and the village in this crisis.”

Homes of Copts have been attacked by mobs of Muslim villagers in other parts of Minya in recent months. In August Coptic houses were attacked after it was discovered the Copts were praying in a home owned by one of them, since there is no village church.

In the same month, a Coptic diocese in Luxor governorate saw its eighth church closed while seeking legal recognition. Mob rule has meant that many churches in the process of being officially licensed have been unable to complete the process due to security concerns. {eoa}

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