

Copts Sentenced to 3 Years in Prison for Maspero Gun Theft

The North Cairo Criminal Court sentenced two Copts, Maikel Adel Naguib Farag and Maikel Mossad Shaker, to three years imprisonment on Monday for stealing a machine gun from the armed forces during the violence of Oct. 9, 2011, when the Egyptian military attacked a peaceful civil rights demonstration made up largely of members of the Coptic community in Maspero, Cairo.

The two men were among 34 arrested on the night of the Maspero Massacre, and were formally charged on Oct. 10, 2011. Charges leveled against Naguib and Shaker included incitement, stealing weapons from the armed forces, attempting to break into the state television building and damaging public and private property.

The men appear to have been convicted on very little evidence. For example, Maikel Adel Naguib Farag was initially arrested at his home on Nov. 3, 2011. Prosecutors claimed that the taxi driver who had driven him home had seen him carrying a gun bundled in a plastic bag. After his home was searched, he was reportedly beaten and taken away in his underwear. The only evidence brought against him at trial was the word of the taxi driver.

An estimated 28 people were killed and over 200 injured in violence that erupted after the police and military violently dispersed a large group of mainly Coptic protestors who had gathered outside the state television offices in Maspero to protest the demolition of a church in Upper Egypt.

Despite video footage of Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) running over protesters, official sources have continuously denied any wrongdoing on the part of the armed forces, instead

accusing protestors of assaulting the army and of stealing the vehicles seen in the footage. Three low-ranking soldiers were convicted of the lesser charge of involuntary manslaughter of fourteen protestors in September 2012. However, no-one has been held responsible for the deaths of the remaining victims, most of whom died from gunshot wounds, despite subsequent denials by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) that its troops had used live ammunition.

Andrew Johnston, Advocacy Director at Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, "Given the serious nature of the charges, CSW is deeply concerned at the quality of the evidence brought against Maikel Adel Naguib Farag and Maikel Mossad Shaker in this case, which appears insufficient to justify a guilty verdict.

"Sadly, 15 months on from the Maspero Massacre, there remain unanswered questions about the military's actions on that day, and justice continues to elude the families of the civilians who died at the hands of the army. We continue to call for a full, transparent and independent judicial enquiry into the massacre at Maspero, including an investigation of the allegedly inciting role played by state media."