

Egyptian Attackers Christian **Judge Who** **Frees Knifed**

A judge in Upper Egypt has dismissed all charges against a group of Salafi Muslims who cut off the ear of a Christian in a knife attack and tried to force him to convert.

The Salafists, who say they base their religion on the practices of the first three generations of Muslims after Muhammad, had falsely accused 46-year-old Ayman Anwar Metry of having an affair with a Muslim woman, the Christian told Compass. On April 22 the judge exonerated the assailants only after Metry, under intense pressure in a “reconciliation meeting,” agreed to drop charges, said his attorney, Asphoure Wahieb Hekouky.

“Him dropping the case and accepting the reconciliation meeting is shameful,” Hekouky said of the Egyptian justice system.

The same Salafi Muslims who attacked Metry terrorized him and his family for a year, Hekouky said.

The Attack

On the afternoon of March 20, 2011, in Qena, in the province of the same name, a group of about 20 Salafi Muslims attacked Metry. Earlier that day, someone had set fire to an unoccupied rental apartment he owned in the city.

While waiting in another part of the city for workman to arrive to fix a metal door on the burned-out unit, two men approached Metry and convinced him that he needed to go back to the remains of his apartment. After his arrival, the Salafi Muslims pounced on him. They accused him of having an inappropriate relationship with one of his former female

tenants and began beating him.

"I didn't know that there were any more of them than the two who were talking nicely to me at the beginning, so I was shocked when I went with them to the flat," Metry said. "There were 20 more waiting for me there, and they caught me and started beating me up."

The men interrogated Metry as they beat him, demanding he "confess" to the affair and tell them where the woman was. Metry said he told them he didn't do anything wrong and didn't know where the woman was, but the Salafists were able to find her and brought her to the charred apartment.

They demanded that the woman admit to an affair of some sort, but, like Metry, she said they had never been romantically involved. Then the men broke into two groups; one set upon the woman, and the other began beating Metry. During the beating, the men restrained Metry, took a knife and began sawing open the back of his neck. They told the woman that they would kill him if she didn't say she had had some type of affair with him. She did as they ordered.

Metry said his attackers demanded he say the *Shahada*, the Islamic creed for conversion, and that when he refused, they cut off his ear.

Covered with puddles of his blood, the apartment looked like a slaughterhouse, Metry said.

"If you saw how I looked then ... My shirt, if you squeezed it, it dripped an unbelievable amount of blood. With all the blood that was on the floor, it looked like there was a sheep slaughtered there," he said. "They thought that I was dead, so then they called the police and said, 'We took our *sharia* [Islamic law] rights, now you come and take your civil rights from him.'"

The police came and took Metry and the woman to the hospital.

The two, along with a Muslim friend of Metry's who witnessed the attack and happens to be a police officer, were then taken into police custody.

"Officer Khaled was with me and worked hard to help me—he witnessed the whole thing and he testified at the police station," Metry said. "Also, the girl came to the police and said that there was nothing between me and her. She said that the Salafi men forced her to say there was."

Somehow the Salafists found out what the woman said to police, and when officers released the woman after questioning, the hard-line Muslims caught up with her, Metry said.

"Then when they heard that the girl didn't say what they wanted her to say, they beat her up again and broke one of her fingers and threatened her and told her if she didn't change what she said at the police station, they would kidnap her sister," Metry said.

None of the Salafi Muslims who committed the attack were arrested.

Intimidation

Almost as soon as the police questioning ended, the assailants began pressuring him not to prosecute anyone, Metry said.

"They used all sorts of ways to persuade me to let it go and drop the case against them—they shot at us; about 500 Salafi gathered around the house trying to set it on fire. When they threatened to set the house on fire and kidnap my sisters, I had to drop the charges against them," he said.

As the date for a hearing drew near three months ago, the Salafi Muslims shot at Metry's house in Qena and at his brother's car, he said.

"I went to see the police to get them to do something, and nothing at all was done to arrest anybody," he said. "It

seemed like they were the police and the controllers of the city, those Salafis.”

The attackers threatened all his family members, he said, including his brothers and sisters, to try to force him to drop the charges, he said.

“Some of my brothers and sisters emigrated and left the country—they went to Italy,” he said. “I tried to, but I wasn’t allowed to leave the airport.”

Metry said he informed criminal prosecutors what was happening, but his pleas fell on deaf ears.

“During the first reconciliation meeting, I told the attorney general everything and told him that I am dropping the charges under the Salafi threats,” he said. “After all that, I saw that the police did nothing to arrest any of them, and they are all free.”

A final factor was a request from Bishop Sharoubeem, the Coptic Orthodox bishop of Qena, who asked him to drop the case, according to Metry.

“He asked me to drop the case, but I insisted on not dropping the case at all. I insisted on getting my rights back,” he said. “But when a bishop comes and asks you to drop the case, what else could you do other than following his advice? He told me that they might try and attack or burn the local church if I didn’t drop the case.”

Metry said the bishop, speaking for the Coptic Orthodox Church, agreed to compensate him for the property he lost in the fire and attack. The bishop could not be reached for confirmation.

Still, Metry said he was robbed of justice.

“They are free in the street threatening us when we come or go,” he said. “Even when they shot at us, and we called the

police and security forces thinking that they would arrest them, nothing was done at all.”

Emotionally ‘Below Zero’

The recovery for Metry and his family after the attack has been difficult, but he said it has brought him closer to God.

The Salafists were trying to beat him to death, Metry said, so they could “kill the facts” of the attack. In addition to slicing off his ear, they cut him all over his body and left bruises from a beating that “would have killed a camel,” he said.

In total, he had to have 35 stitches and two reconstructive surgical procedures where his ear once was. The ear was too badly damaged to be reattached.

“It took me three months to recover from all the injuries and the two plastic surgeries on my ear,” he said.

Metry and his immediate family spent most of the year after the attack fleeing from one part of Qena Province to another, making it impossible for his three children, ages 6 to 12, to attend school. Because his employer cannot or will not transfer him, he has had to take a year off from work and support himself with savings and what rental income he has left.

The attacks and the changes of residence have scarred his children, too, with his 6-year-old girl probably suffering the worst, he said.

“She shakes if she sees a bearded man walking down the street, because of what happened to me,” Metry said. “The little girl asked her mother to let her take a knife with her to her kindergarten class in case somebody attacks her, so she can defend herself.”

Metry’s wife, Thanaa Yakoub Gerges, concurred.

"We were living well, the children and us, but after what happened emotionally we are below zero," she said. "It made us hate the house, the city and the whole country. Imagine when you lose your reputation and can't move. We were destroyed gradually, this happened more than a year ago, and the children are being destroyed gradually. I am willing to die for Christ, but these are my children who are being attacked."

Through it all, however, Metry said he found a glimmer of faith he previously had not known.

"I am not saying this to puff up my spirit, but at that moment when they were attacking me, I couldn't believe the faith that was in me. I couldn't believe that I actually had this faith, it was a testimony—I won, I didn't lose," he said. "They tried everything to convert me to Islam, but I didn't care. I said they could do anything they wanted to me, I wouldn't convert."