

# ***Social Reconciliation: Pre- and Post-Conflict in the Egyptian Setting***

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction	p. 3
II. Case Study: Izbet Bushra	p. 4
III. Diagnosis: Media Reporting and the Use of Reconciliation Sessions in Restoring Peace	p. 6
A. Major Actors	p. 6
1. Government	p. 6
2. The Security Apparatus	p. 7
3. Local Actors	p. 8
4. The Church	p. 8
5. The Media	p. 9
B. Media Reporting	p. 9
1. Faulty Journalistic Practices	p. 10
2. Expatriate Coptic Websites	p. 11
3. Media Coverage of Izbet Bushra	p.11
C. The Use of Reconciliation Sessions in Restoring Peace	p.12
1. Obstacles to Success	p. 13
2. Case Studies	p. 13
3. Opinions about Reconciliation Sessions	p. 15
4. The Legal Basis of Reconciliation	p. 16
IV. Prognosis: Corrective Steps and Observations	p. 17
A. The Role of the State	p. 18
B. The Role of Local Religious Leadership	p. 19
1. The Influence of Local Priests and Imams	p. 19
2. Reasons for Necessary Christian Initiative	p. 20
3. Practices Promoting Good Community Relations	p. 21
4. Removal of Leadership	p. 22
5. Reconciliation along Religious Lines?	p. 23

C. The Role of the Media	p. 23	
D. The Role of Non-governmental Organizations	p. 24	
E. Outside Perspectives	p. 25	
1. Egyptian Patterns of Conflict Resolution	p. 25	
2. An Early Warning System	p. 27	
3. International Examples		p. 27
V. Therapy: How to Address Conflict		p. 28
A. Before		p. 28
1. Improving Community Relations	p. 28	
2. Training for Skills and Building a Network	p. 30	
B. During		p. 31
1. Identification of Leaders	p. 31	
2. Contextual Studies	p. 32	
C. After		p. 32
1. Field Visits to Collect Information and Promote Dialogue	p. 33	
2. Identifying a Mediator		p. 33
3. Evaluating Izbet Bushra		p. 34
4. Considering a Project to Promote Community Interaction	p. 34	
VI. Conclusion		p. 35
VII. Recommendations from the Project		
	p. 35	

## **Introduction**

In all countries of the world, conflict is normal, and Egypt is no exception to this rule. In beginning a study which seeks to delineate solutions for the prevention of conflict and the repair of relationships following its outbreak, it is important to remember this fundamental truth: Where people exist in community, conflict is normal. Individuals and groups have different interpretations of basic needs and interests, and there is continual negotiation between parties over the realization of these goals. Furthermore, concerning Egypt in particular, rapid population growth and limited land area suitable for settlement has exasperated the natural struggles over resources, taxing the ability of both state and society to provide for the needs of all in an equitable and judicious manner. Much policy analysis, incorporating the fields of economics, agriculture, and sociology is necessary for the heads of state to navigate this emerging crisis. These notions, however, are beyond the scope of this paper as well as the peacemaking project funding by the ZIVIC program of the German Institute for Foreign Affairs. Instead, our focus is on the maintenance of good relations among competing factions of

Egyptian society, seeking first to prevent the escalation of conflict into violence and armed struggle, and second to help restore peace after such escalation has taken place and divided communities.

This paper will follow the methodology utilized by retired Prof. Johan Galtung, who has taught at Columbia, Princeton, Hawaii, Oslo, and other prominent universities. He was a pioneer in field of active sociology, seeking to move beyond the simple academic description of communities and where necessary, community violence, into a proactive application of the data in an effort to encourage peace. He analyzes conflict along medical lines: First provide a diagnosis of the problem, then offer a prognosis of possible solutions, and conclude with appropriate therapy to restore health to the organism.<sup>i</sup>

Though population and environmental factors contribute significantly to the escalation of conflict in Egyptian society, in keeping our focus on local analysis it will be seen that the diagnosis of the problem identifies two main culprits in fermenting tensions. The first is a culture of sectarian analysis which interprets ordinary community struggles along religious lines. This phenomenon is common to many parties, but the media are especially culpable. The second is the misapplication of what are known as 'reconciliation sessions', which are traditional methods for solving community conflicts outside the scope of the law. In addition to identification of the main actors in conflict situations, these two factors will be described in detail summarizing findings made over the initial months of this project.

The prognosis for taking corrective steps in solving conflict will be organized according to the different roles of the main actors. Specifically, these will describe the role of the state, the church, local religious leadership, the media, and civil society. Each group will be shown as having important contributions to the building of peace, though some aspects will be debated, as will be seen. The suggestions which proceed from this analysis have been formulated through both study and field visits conducted in the scope of the project.

Finally, the therapy proposed will operate on a timeline of before, during, and after the incident of conflict. Certain steps can be taken on both a national and a local level which will provide techniques for dealing with conflict and instilling a mentality which is aware of the potential for escalation, and the consequences thereof. Once a conflict has taken place, however, certain steps become immediately necessary, such as the identification of local leadership which can transcend the struggle at hand in order to maintain the bonds of community. In the period in which the incident of conflict has passed but the repercussions are still being felt, these leaders must be engaged in order to promote dialogue and consideration of the other. Field visits are necessary for all phases of therapy, but while we have been able to conduct some, this area requires our further practical involvement. Our ability to engage in these activities has been hampered by the cumbersome process of bureaucratic government authorization of many aspects of the project.

This report has been informed through many methods. The chief case study through which we will analyze conflict is consideration of the village of Izbet Bushra, of

the governorate of Beni Suef, approximately 140 kilometers south of Cairo. This village has witnessed tensions and violence between its Christian and Muslim population over the building of a church. Field visits have been conducted which resulted in several interviews in addition to a questionnaire answered by priests throughout the bishopric. In addition we have contacted many Cairo-based authorities to seek their counsel on many matters involved in this study. We have utilized the extensive database of Arab West Report<sup>ii</sup> to study background issues involved in conflict, as well as to produce media analysis on the manner of reporting in conflict situations. Finally, we have held two workshops, one for journalists and the other for NGO personnel, in order both to learn from them their perspective on solving conflict and to impart to them our vision for better contribution. It is hoped that the experience gained in pursuit of the goal of peacemaking in the Egyptian context will produce a study worthy of implementation, to which we will commit ourselves in application of the peacemaking project.

### **Case Study: Izbet Bushra**

There are many different types of conflict in Egyptian society, and over time our project aims to be involved in many of the different scenarios, that we might gain the experience necessary to suggest patterns of solution regardless of the root causes or diverse actors. Our first scenario is not uncommon in Egypt, however, as it involves the challenge of building churches. Many Copts and human rights advocates argue the need for a unified law for building houses of worship. As it currently stands, it is far easier to obtain legal permission to build a mosque than it is to build a church. Though the many churches of Egypt operate with complete freedom of worship, the building, renovation, or expansion of a church structure can result in endless bureaucratic procedure, security review, and ultimately depends on direct authorization from the governor. Many Copts have found it easier to simply build a church without permission, and then negotiate its registration. Many churches simply never bother with registration at all, as they have achieved a level of community acceptance that they believe renders the legal proceedings unnecessary.

Izbet Bushra is a small village in the governorate of Beni Suef, composed of roughly two to three thousand individuals, of whom an estimated one-third to two-fifths are Christian. The village was founded by a Christian landholder in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but despite its roots the inhabitants never constructed a church. Religious services were conducted by a visiting priest, or else people traveled a few kilometers away to a neighboring village which had a church. The Muslims of the village built a community mosque only fifteen years ago, and all sides declare that the two religious groupings have always lived together in peace.

Religious identity has been an increasing attraction for Egyptians of all varieties, and this has led both city dwellers and villagers to attach themselves with devotion to the cause of their faith, as well as to its external symbols, be they church or mosque. Added to this development is the population growth which has pressed upon all Egyptians, and the once comfortable Christian community of Izbet Bushra now finds itself with many more Christians than the visitation work of a priest can handle.

Perhaps it was a natural desire to construct a home for the priest and his family that first gave the Christians of Izbet Bushra the idea to build themselves a church. After all, if a building is to be constructed, why not also include open floor space which can be made into a sanctuary for services? Anticipating the obstacles suffered by Christians throughout Egypt in obtaining a church building permit, however, they decided on a different track. They sought official permission to build, not a residence, not a church, but a factory. This was welcome news to the people of the village, who like many in Upper Egypt are economically disadvantaged. Authorization was granted and the Muslims of the village lent a hand in construction.

As the building was taking shape it did not resemble a church building at all, but consisted of three stories, the ground floor serving as a church, the first floor as a general hall, and the third floor as residence for the priest and his family. The true purposes must have become known along the way, for there were sporadic incidents of vandalism committed against the building and the small plot of farmland within the borders of the property. Nevertheless, the priest took residence in July of 2008 and the building was officially consecrated as a church by the bishop of Beba and el-Fashn around that time.

Things remained quiet for a long time, though small acts of vandalism continued to occur, not only to the church but also to farmland of the various families in the village. Meanwhile Muslims of the village began constructing a mosque directly across the street from the church. The priest relates that he sought thereafter for official registration of the building as a church, but was sent away temporarily after which state sanction would be granted upon his return. He came back in early summer of 2009, and reports that he went repeatedly to the police station to follow up on the promises made concerning the church. Despite his efforts, no progress was forthcoming.

It appears that the priest then took matters into his own hands, though the details are not certain, either on his part or in the reaction of state security forces and the Muslim population. On June 20, 2009, he conducted a large prayer service for fifty families, and the next day there arrived a sizeable delegation of young men from the village currently living in Cairo. As this group sought to visit the priest there ensued a confrontation with security, which was keeping watch suspiciously over the priest's residence, while maintaining security for the building. Within a short period of time neighbors began to gather outside checking into the matter, and stones and bricks were thrown by both sides, perhaps even from the roof of the church. Certain Muslim elements mobilized and attacked the church, causing significant damage, and then proceeded to attack Christian homes nearby. Within time the security contingent was reinforced and the violence suppressed. An unsteady calm settled over the village, but at least the violence ceased.

Christians complained, however, that the curfew enforced was primarily directed at them, and that security itself committed violations against Christian homes. In the days which followed there was a sit-in demonstration organized at the bishopric of Beba and el-Fashn in support of the Christians of Izbet Bushra. Shortly thereafter was organized a reconciliation session, attended by the governor, bishop, leading men of the village, and security personnel. Forgiveness was exchanged, compensation was

promised to the suffering parties, the mosque constructed across from the church was given license, and the Christians were promised another church in a different part of the village. All stipulations, however, were oral. Media reported that all was well<sup>iii</sup>, but despite the increased security presence small acts of vandalism continued. To this day the promised church has not been authorized, leading Christians to assert official discrimination against them. In any case, the current security reluctance to grant a church puts a significant question to the claims of 'reconciliation' and restored community peace. Whereas on one level there is no more fighting and therefore peace, in discussions with villagers, especially the Christians among them, there is still a deep sense of frustration about the situation.<sup>iv</sup> There are different ways of defining peace, yet our project aims for the restoration of relationships, not simply the absence of fighting.

### **Diagnosis –Media Reporting and the Use of Reconciliation Committees in Restoring Peace**

Before beginning a description of the full diagnosis of circumstances which limit peace and good relations in Egyptian communities, it is useful to provide a short description of the major actors in the typical incident of conflict. This includes the government, the security forces, local actors, at times the church, and the media. Each of these groups will be described according to observed patterns of behavior.

#### **Major Actors**

##### *Government*

The Egyptian government often does not have a direct role in the handling of local disputes, but deserves to be listed first for its chief position of responsibility over the affairs of the nation as a whole. Generally speaking the government allows its local representatives and security forces to administer between parties in conflict. The government tends to involve itself upon escalation of the conflict, so as to protect the reputation of the state at both the national and international levels. The conflict in Izbet Bushra was not sufficiently large to demand public attention; the current conflict in Nag Hamadi, on the contrary, is consuming the attention of the government, which is publicly seen.

One method for protecting the reputation of the state is for the government to cast itself as a mediator in solving disputes.<sup>v</sup> By carefully lending the weight of authority the state can succeed in bringing both sides of the conflict into negotiation. Though it will be seen in the application of reconciliation sessions this is not always successful or appreciated, the process allows the state to present itself as the neutral party, making an effort to avoid blame and receive credit for creating breakthroughs. If it is successful, it rightly receives support for its national reputation.

The other aspect of concern for reputation involves the important work of preserving the national unity, on both the national and international levels. When the state intervenes in conflict, specifically if the conflict exists between a Muslim and a

Christian party, the typical response is to downplay sectarian aspects of the struggle while reminding Egyptians of the general fraternity between religious creeds. Though this stance is susceptible to protests of insincerity, the message preached is important for all citizens, as well as the international audience which monitors internal religious relations.

In the eyes of many Copts, however, the proclamation of 'general fraternity' rings hollow when viewed in light of the difficulties faced in building a church. This can only be authorized by the regional governor, requires permits which are difficult to obtain, and the procedure for all steps is vague and lacking transparency. Though at times church building becomes a political issue of identity for the Coptic community, in most cases the desire to build or expand a church stems from the realities of population growth and outdated facilities.<sup>vi</sup> The difficulties at times push Christians into backdoor 'solutions', angering in turn both Muslims and local security, as witnessed in Izbet Bushra. Ultimately, this is a government responsibility, and many human rights advocates have called for the passing of a unified law for building houses of worship. Current efforts, however, have stalled in parliament.

The idea of 'general fraternity' is also questioned in government policy toward conflicts between religious parties. Popular debate, especially following Nag Hamadi, concerns whether or not these conflicts are sectarian in nature, with equal evidences and emotions marshaled on either side. The primary responsibility of government, however, is the protection of its citizens, and it is noteworthy that while the state has a clear policy toward the Muslim Brotherhood and instances of Islamist violence, it has no definitive policy toward interreligious violence, sectarian or not. This is the opinion of a senior Egyptian European diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity. He speculates this may be due to government annoyance with the church, both for its power and the flaunting of it. The pope has far more influence over bishops, priests, and regular Christians than the government has over its officials and regular citizens. Moreover, the government sees this hierarchy breaking laws and strong-arming the government, and the state responds with a hands-off policy toward interreligious conflict. The state, of course, responds to each incident, but the diplomat speculates the lack of a clear policy may be reflective of government frustration with church conduct and attitude. Regardless, it is the innocent Christian and Muslim villagers who suffer.<sup>vii</sup> Though the role and conduct of the church will be regarded below, these factors identify faulty governance on the part of the state.

### *The Security Apparatus*

Though the security apparatus is an extension of the government, it is worthy to be treated independently because unlike the state bureaucracy it mobilizes rapidly in instances of conflict. Certain Coptic accusations, however, question both the proactive and immediate reactive abilities of security, at times claiming even willful negligence or worse, as was stated in Izbet Bushra, active incitement against the Christians.<sup>viii</sup> One cannot accept such claims in a polarized situation face value since several Christian leaders have declared that they have had positive experiences with security responses,<sup>ix</sup> whereas Christians in conflict situations tend to focus their anger directly on



security. In a country where anger often results in exaggerations extreme caution must be exercised with such allegations.

Anger exhibited by Christians toward security during conflict situations is often related to the implementation of strict instructions from higher security authorities, regarding requested permits for church building. These instructions are not public; if reasons for decisions made are given at all they are extremely vague. When officers do comment it is to indicate concern for peace (understood as a lack of fighting) in a particular area. Anger then stems not only from the lack of transparency but also from the understanding that if security fears local Muslim opposition to building or expanding a Christian church they will postpone or block its construction, yielding to Muslim sensibilities rather than defending the right of their community to worship suitably to the size of its population.

At times, Pope Shenouda has publicly blamed security, as has the Coptic weekly *Watani*. Many Copts in conflict situations simply repeat the accusations they have heard from their own leaders, even if they have not addressed the particulars of their situation and provided evidence for their claims. Furthermore, though many if not most security officers tend to be secular and oppose Islamist efforts to expand the place of public Islam, the difficulties of obtaining permits lead many Copts to believe in an Islamist infiltration of the security forces, which is an assumption difficult to prove.

What is unquestioned is the effectiveness of security in locking down an area and preventing further outbreaks of violence. This is an essential first step in restoring peace to an area. The security apparatus, however, is also involved in process of reconciliation sessions, and it is here which there is more controversy and question about its role. It is often reported that following an incident of violence members of both sides are arrested and held until reconciliation sessions are concluded. Upon a successful agreement all parties are released. Discussion about these procedures will be discussed later, but it is not uncommon to see members of the state security present as celebratory photos are taken and published in the newspapers. They are an integral part of the current practice of reconciliation.

### *Local Actors*

Local actors represent the most variable part of the equation of conflict and reconciliation, and can represent local politicians, heads of families, business leaders, religious leaders, and tribal chiefs, all depending on the setting. At times these can be the parties most responsible for conflict as they fight for their interest over that of the other, but they can also be the greatest hope of local reconciliation, commanding the submission of intransigent actors to their voice of reason and community harmony. As will be highlighted later, the best chances for peace lie in identification and mobilization of these powerful community forces. In addition to these there is the factor of youth, many of whom are underemployed or unemployed. Though these are not often a key party in reconciliation efforts, they are often the source of community violence when relations go awry. It is easy for idle hands to find trouble. All other actors are largely institutional; personal contact resulting in changed attitudes and behaviors is unlikely, but these real people possess great influence, if able to be harnessed.

## *The Church*

It is obvious to state that the church is only an actor in events which involve the Christian community, but as this is the case in a fair number of recent incidents of conflict it is important to review its role. Ninety percent of all Christians in Egypt belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church, which is led by the hierarchical authority of Pope Shenouda III, whose leadership style has been compared to a father over his children. His personal responses have varied, but when he has spoken into issues he has often been critical of the state security apparatus, reinforcing a negative outlook among many Christians, but expressive of confidence in the administration of Egypt's executive and judicial branches.<sup>x</sup> The church supports the call for national unity, encouraging Coptic participation in all aspects of social and political life. There has been a great revival in Christian identity during his service,<sup>xi</sup> paralleling the increasing Islamic identity manifest among many Egyptian Muslims. It is fair to question the sources of this revival and which ones have been either effect or cause, but it is noticeable that in the background of many instances of conflict is a Coptic perception of being a community under discrimination, if not persecution. This mentality puts a religious interpretation on events which may or may not have been there otherwise, just as the fact of a general conflict between a Muslim and a Christian may elicit a violent Muslim response against their Christian neighbors, with Christians often defending themselves by trying to get the media, both national and international, on their side. The issue of Izbet Bushra is clearly an example of this phenomenon.

In addition to the central leadership of the pope there exist the disparate personalities of area bishops and priests. Though the Coptic Orthodox Church is largely united behind its pope, different styles and manners make for variable outcomes to any particular incident. Some religious leaders may be conciliatory and socially oriented toward the greater community; others may be internally focused on developing the identity and Christian character of their parish. Each constitution carries opportunities and consequences. These also will be seen in the example of Izbet Bushra, as well as in other testimony to be related. The important fact here is that the church is not monolithic; all the vagaries of human nature are found among its representatives.

The final aspect of the church as an actor during times of conflict is witnessed in the behavior of the expatriate Coptic community. The church's official bishoprics extend beyond the borders of the Egyptian state, and Copts in Europe, America, and Australia are an often vocal part of its constituency. Taking advantage of the freedom in which they live, these Copts are generally bolder than their counterparts in criticizing the powers responsible for the interpreted lower condition of their Egyptian counterparts. While among this group exist some extremist activists who will blatantly distort the realities of Christian life in Egypt, many others seek to employ international pressure to provoke official change.<sup>xii</sup> Individual bishops in Egypt can benefit from the material and financial support of these members, but the church as a whole tends to downplay their call for action against the Egyptian state, with which the church enjoys close ties.<sup>xiii</sup>

## *The Media*

The media in Egypt is represented by many outlets of many varieties. There are the satellite channels which are beamed into nearly every home, transmitting news from abroad, as well as specific Islamic or Christian programming which can internationalize the Egyptian religious identity, either for good or for ill. The national television station maintains command over the majority of the population, with 97% watching to some degree. While only 14% read the newspapers on a daily basis,<sup>xiv</sup> the impact here can be greater, since the television is the official voice of the government while the press maintains significant freedom to express opposing viewpoints, certainly in comparison to other countries in the Middle East.<sup>xv</sup> Furthermore, it is the educated and opinion makers who read the newspapers, and thus secondarily influence the rest of society. Internet and blogging sources are also an increasingly popular form of news consumption, though still are limited to about 7-9% of the population.<sup>xvi</sup> Not simply composing the technological class, many of these users are youth who access through internet cafés, extending to the larger and medium-sized cities of Upper Egypt, from which even residents of smaller villages, such as Izbet Bushra, can access news. These include outlets as well for the Coptic expatriate viewpoint, which will be examined later.

The aspect of the media in promoting or hindering peaceful relations in Egypt requires additional study, for its effect is wide in cultivating the broad perspectives of how Egyptians view each other and the tensions which exist in society. While through our project it is difficult to affect the international satellite channels, as is the official government viewpoint expressed through national television, the newspapers can be both analyzed and influenced as they are more accessible to well-directed civil society initiatives. These findings will be discussed below.

## **Media Reporting**

The press in Egypt has a long and outstanding history, having been and remaining a leader in the Arab World. Egypt was one of the first in the region to promote a popular press, which played an important role in the struggle for independence and the crafting of a modern state. After the revolution of 1952, however, the press was nationalized, and since then there have been waves of increasing and decreasing freedom of operation. Currently there exists a national newspaper, *al-Ahram*, and several semi-governmental publications. Opposition political parties operate newspapers which follow party policy; independent newspapers are funded by wealthy businessmen. Chief among these independent newspapers is *al-Masry al-Youm*, which is generally widely respected. Within the last four years it has become a major source for reporting on tensions. There is also *Watani*, a Christian administrated independent newspaper, separate from the church, which aims for objectivity in its national coverage. A listing of these major outlets and their leanings can be found in the selection criteria of Arab West Report.<sup>xvii</sup>

### *Faulty Journalistic Practices*

The situation for balanced and objective reporting in Egypt is not dire, but restrictions on freedom and a deteriorating economic situation have combined to

decrease the quality of journalistic reporting. In December of 2009 we conducted a workshop to train journalists in proper professional behavior and discovered that in the majority of newspapers there is little provided in the way of training and equipping. Operating as a business, many newspapers do not tend to the ongoing professional development of their staff, resulting in a stratification of skills—established journalists maintain their prominent positions but younger journalists are left to themselves. Emerging journalists of the younger generation tend to be forced into the new media of internet reporting and blogging, as the editorial boards maintain a preference for the old hands.<sup>xviii</sup>

Many of the reasons for improper journalism stem from legitimate sources. There is pressure to meet deadlines, financial resources are not available for travel, and even cell phone costs are often not reimbursed. Moreover, journalists must often bow to the wishes of their editor or editorial board, which may maintain a specific slant due to its political or business leanings. Journalists face the problem of sources which deliberately mislead, as well as the tendency to self-censor in order to preserve good relations with a valued source. All the above pressures make it difficult to separate the fact from the fiction.

During our workshop, however, journalists admitted that many of their colleagues engage freely in the sensationalizing of issues. They will make certain items into political struggles where none exists, and report ordinary conflicts of interest as a sectarian struggle. They will engage in speculation but report it as news, and exaggerate a story in order to create a bigger headline. Important issues will be downplayed in favor of smaller but more controversial items, and some conflicts will be deliberately escalated in order to promote and maintain a story. In all of these areas journalists placed fault on many in their profession.<sup>xix</sup> Even if journalists wish to keep to strict standards, however, it is the editorial boards which maintain control over publication, and these are generally beyond the reach of corrective training.

The situation is worse, however, in Upper Egypt. Scarce resources are spent first in Cairo, and only what remains is dedicated toward the improvement of journalistic abilities in the rest of the country. Moreover, the best journalists migrate or are promoted to serve in the capital, leaving the rest of the nation underserved in terms of quality investigation and reporting. Many newspapers do not even maintain permanent salaried journalists in the regional centers of Upper Egypt, choosing instead to operate through part time freelancers who may or may not be aware of and faithful to standard journalistic codes.<sup>xx</sup> Alternatively, many engage in what is called 'capital journalism', which consists of phone calls made to established sources in the region, such as the spokesman of the governor, mayor, or church, or a quick short visit, with the result that though the source is official it may well be biased. The consequences for Egypt in this situation are severe, for Upper Egypt is the source of many, if not the majority, of violent incidences of conflict. With such poor journalistic representation it is no wonder that the resulting reporting thereof is superficial, slanted, and subjective. Unfortunately, many Christians and Muslims rely on such reports from their preferred media outlets, confirming previously held viewpoints and deepening the divide of understanding. Quality investigative reporting could break through these strongholds, but current practices make such journalism very rare indeed.

### *Expatriate Coptic Websites*

There is another aspect of the media which deserves attention for the escalation of conflict and the creation of a mentality which maintains its inevitability. Foreign Coptic reporting is concerned to counter what is perceived as official government and media negligence of the sufferings of the Christian community in Egypt. In the current administration of the Nag Hamadi Christmas killings, in which six Copts were gunned down as they exited Christmas Eve mass, along with one Muslim police officer assigned to guard the church, the judicial proceedings are being conducted as a criminal event, not as a sectarian one. While the media outlets have taken all varieties of the possible positions, the expatriate Coptic websites focus squarely on the Christian perspective of what took place. In and of itself, this should not represent a problem.

Unfortunately, in their effort to defend the Coptic position many outlets swing entirely to the other side of the pendulum, ignoring journalistic rules in the process. Their websites will rely on testimony from the street, given in the heat of the moment, which while having its place is not balanced by testimony from other sources, especially Muslim ones. This creates a scenario in which only the Christian viewpoint of an event is reported, which though possible as an interpreted perspective on events is not based conclusively on the evidence or sources at hand. Though alternative Muslim or neutral perspectives may also lack definitiveness, these are generally not reported at all, and the preferred position becomes established as fact.<sup>xxi</sup> Due to the wide availability of these websites over the internet their influence has impacted the Coptic community of Egypt, many of whom trust these reports over the media available within Egypt. Of course, for many Egyptians of any religious conviction, reasons can be found to doubt the reporting of any media outlet.

### *Media Coverage of Izbet Bushra*

The above findings are broad and general, but can be found specifically in the case of Izbet Bushra. In a media report prepared by our office we found that of the twenty-six articles we identified about the incident, covered in nine different newspapers, 46% failed to mention any source at all for their information. This clear violation of journalistic principles allows the author to create a perception through his reporting without giving the reader an opportunity to judge the story based on its source. Furthermore, of the articles which did mention their source material, 43% presented the testimony of sources from only one side, specifically, the Christian one. This does not necessarily imply a pro-Christian bias, however, for two reasons. First, Christian sources are often easier to obtain as many Christians want to go public and strive to be accessible to media outlets. Second, lower level government sources often have the opposite tendency, fearing to make an incorrect statement on sensitive issues. They therefore prefer to remain silent and allow the higher authorities to make the official pronouncements. Regardless of the reasons, however, and whether or not this represents bias, it is at least possible to demonstrate from these statistics the need for more professional journalistic standards.

It is also noteworthy that 76% of the articles were written by independent newspapers, while political party newspapers provided the second share of articles at 20%. The pro-government newspapers only published one article about Izbet Bushra, and this focused on the reconciliation session alone. Again, conclusions should be tentative, but the lack of pro-government press indicates unwillingness to report about sectarian tensions, while the party newspapers express no qualms about what could be interpreted as government deficiency. The independent newspapers, meanwhile, understand that sectarian events sell newspapers, and have published accordingly.<sup>xxii</sup>

Coptic media reporting, however, was not only flawed but also had an agenda to push. While some aspects of the incident in Izbet Bushra were supported through quoting prominent Egyptian intellectuals and drawing from the print media or NGO publications, other aspects failed to meet journalistic standards. Charges and accusations were carried without reference to sources, and stories were conveyed without Muslim testimony. The incident was tallied as one in a sequence of ongoing sectarian conflict without reference to original village issues. While certain authors blamed Muslim villagers more than others, most were resolute in blaming security for the troubles in the area. The troubles of Izbet Bushra, in fact, were of less concern in reporting and investigation than the opportunity they afforded to present the litany of Coptic complaints, no matter how legitimate some may be.

From within a sectarian reporting style five themes were addressed repeatedly: One, there is an urgent need for parliament to pass a law for a unified code in building houses of worship. Two, instigators and perpetrators of sectarian violence must not be allowed to go free. Three, there is a priority of justice put before reconciliation. Four, inflammatory speeches issued from the mosque must be prevented. Five, there is a need for wide reform in the areas of education, media, and social attitudes, for systemic flaws in the system drive sectarian conflict in Egypt.<sup>xxiii</sup> While all of these points deserve wide consideration from the society at large, the issue lies in the manner of reporting. Each of these points is connected to the conflict in Izbet Bushra, but by presenting them with minor consideration of local details and root issues, it is the message which fuels the reporting, rather than the other way around. Izbet Bushra and other similar examples become proof texts for these mantras; unfortunately the effect is to leave the readers a superficial understanding of the incident itself, which if understood in all its nuances would soften the strident positions encouraged by these websites.

### **The Use of Reconciliation Sessions in Restoring Peace**

The second major obstacle to the restoration of peaceful community relations following conflict, after journalistic misreporting, is the improper use of reconciliation sessions. In its normal procedure there is a dispute which takes place within a community, and it is decided to address this conflict of interest outside the scope of the law. This is often for very practical considerations. It is very time consuming to solve disputes through the legal system, which is already overburdened with cases. Parties often find that it can be quicker to employ traditional reconciliation sessions.

In this traditional proceeding the two parties submit their cause to the village elders, sometimes with the participation of a mutually respected local public figure. Through negotiation, mediation, and dialogue the elders will decide the case which will then be enforced upon the conflicting parties through the mechanisms of tribal or community custom. The elders assume responsibility if there is any failure to forfeit material compensation, and the larger community accepts the rule of its trusted leaders. Though the losing party in the dispute may maintain hard feelings toward the other, the situation as a whole has been restored and members of the sub-community ensure that any remaining ill will does not continue to poison the ongoing peace of all. Everything is established and conducted through extra-legal channels.

### *Obstacles to Success*

Should such reconciliation sessions fail there should be recourse to the law, though in concept a legal judgment can create permanent division and discord whereas an informal reconciliation holds out hope for restoration of peace, while also giving just judgment in the dispute. Unfortunately, several obstacles can hinder this traditionally ideal situation. First, communities may be of separate cultures or religions and have differing ideas about the 'traditional' ways of reconciliation. The clearest example of this is between the Bedouin culture, traditionally migrant but recently (within generations) settled in communities in the Nile Valley, and settled farmers. Both have established customs which vary one to the other. The other often proposed division is between Muslims and Christian, but many strongly oppose this distinction. Though religious rites and beliefs differ, it is said that these share one culture. Other divisions, which intersect both of the above and complicate them, are the differences between urban and rural life, educated and uneducated, and traditional and Westernized. Each group would have its own assumptions about the reconciliation process, which may or may not be compatible.

Second, in parts of Egypt the process of applying law is weak as local customs prevail over judicial law. This is seen most clearly in cases of land registration in Upper Egypt, as well as in the regional and relational differences in building churches.<sup>xxiv</sup> Therefore, if there is no recourse to the law there is room for manipulation of the reconciliation sessions, given that it is the only option available short of tribal justice. Third, there is interplay between law and informal reconciliation when death or physical injury accompanies a dispute, complicating the matter. Fourth, and most egregiously in the pattern often detected, if parties are 'forced' into participation by local government then the principle of free submission to mutually accepted officials is rendered moot, invalidating any possibility for peace and real reconciliation to follow the agreement. Complicating the situation even further, if the outcome is not desired groups may claim they were forced into the proceedings. All of these situations render the idealistic solution of reconciliation sessions harder to achieve in actual practice.

### *Case Studies*

This fourth point is witnessed in the conflict associated with Izbet Bushra. Though facts are difficult to determine, it appears clear that both sides committed aggression against each other. Though no one was killed, injuries were suffered, and even if it is true that the greater transgressions were committed by Muslim parties, the security was correct in arresting members of both communities. Even the number of arrested parties is difficult to establish, as different reports exist, but it is not uncommon to read of an equal number from both sides, so as to establish a sense of balance. Though this does not appear to be the case in Izbet Bushra, arrested parties were sufficiently large on both sides so as to invite questions about their legitimacy. Are all who are arrested actually guilty? The youthful status of most makes it easier to indict them.

The accusation is leveled against the government that individuals are arrested, apart from their actual participation in conflict, in order to force each group into a reconciliation process. Security procedure can be explained, however, by the extraordinary measures necessary to calm a situation when violent conflict has erupted. It may be better at the time to detain many of those in the area of conflict and then only later investigate the guilt or innocence of each particular individual. Indeed, in the case of Izbet Bushra many of those arrested were released after a few days.

Not all, however, were freed from custody. The procedure in question invites then two further critiques. On the one hand, as stated earlier, keeping some in custody can be seen as leverage forcing the families of those incarcerated into reconciliation proceedings, which are necessarily outside the law. On the other hand, once reconciliation sessions are concluded all arrested parties go free,<sup>xxv</sup> inviting the question about justice and punishment for those truly guilty of crimes.

This is what took place in Izbet Bushra. The reconciliation sessions were conducted quickly after the violent incident took place. These sessions were attended by the governor, security officials, the bishop, and village leaders, and produced an oral agreement which resulted in the release of all the accused. Other stipulations included the paving of the main road leading into the village, benefiting both Muslims and, financial compensation for parties which suffered loss, registration for the mosque which was built in front of the disputed building initially presented by Christians as a factory but designed to be a church, and promise of an alternate location which would be allowed for official Christian worship.

Newspapers took photos of the smiling faces and reported the celebratory trills which followed the reconciliation agreement.<sup>xxvi</sup> Interviews later conducted with both the Christian and Muslim community, however, revealed that though an agreement was made, resulting ostensibly in the church for which Christians had labored deceptively, that there was no real reconciliation between the two sides. In fact, small scale vandalism continued in the aftermath. Though later interviews revealed that the situation had returned to normal, with the issue of church registration still outstanding, the causes of this stabilization will be explored later. For now the important issue to emphasize is that the reconciliation sessions as conducted did not lead toward a restoration of community harmony, but rather perpetuated and cemented the feelings of mistrust and discrimination which led to the conflict in the first place.<sup>xxvii</sup> Fortunately, later reports moderate this opinion, as the priest in question was transferred elsewhere,



and Muslims responded much more favorably to his replacement. Though the issue of the church is still pending, it seems that this change plus an extended period of time with no violence itself can provide an aspect of healing.

It is interesting to note that both the mosque and church were promised licensing after having been built without authorization. Copts often highlight that when aggression has been perpetrated on their church or on their property, though the government does repair the damage it also undertakes repair work or expansion of the area mosque. In cases like this it is the Muslim youth of the village who disturbed the Christian community, yet in restoring the situation general Muslim sentiments are also placated through improvement of their religious facilities. The question is thus raised: Does it benefit to cause problems for Christian? It is imagined local Muslims do not think so cynically, but does the question have merit?<sup>xxviii</sup>

Another example of a less than satisfactory reconciliation session is recorded in al-Tayyiba, a village near the city of Samalut, in the governorate of Minia. Though it also was an incident between Christians and Muslims, this outbreak of violence had nothing to do with church building. Rather, an offensive but ordinary harassment by a Muslim of a local Christian girl resulted in a clash between the larger families and neighbors, each of which proceeded to wreak havoc on the homes of the opposing religious community. During the conflagration one Christian youth was shot and killed. After the security contained the situation and arrested members of both sides, a reconciliation session was organized by both sides, which included the emotionally powerful presentation of burial shrouds by both Muslims and Christians to the victim's family. These were accepted but the offered blood money was refused, in hope that the killer might face prosecution. Media coverage published these symbolic gestures and the return of peace to the area, and eventually everything quieted down. Upon effort to visit the area several months later to investigate the current state of relations, however, the initiative was denied, citing continued tensions between the two sides. It is uncertain at what point the reconciliation efforts failed, but perhaps it was due not so much to the session itself, as to the failure of the law to prosecute the killer. While some argued that the group action made knowing the killer impossible, Christians rejected this statement, and the state of tension continues.<sup>xxix</sup>

Our center has undertaken a study of the times the word 'reconciliation' appears in our media archive, producing seventeen cases for analysis. These represent all discovered attempts at setting a conflict situation through reconciliation sessions since the al-Koshh incidents in the year 2000. These include Beni Walimis, Gerza, Udaysat, Bimha, Dikhliah, Jabal al-Tayr, Isna, Nazlah, Abu Fana, Sidi Salim, Abu Tisht, Tayyiba, al-Fukai', Izbet Girgis, Dakhaliya, and Izbet Bushra. In many of these incidents the media reports that agreements have resulted from the reconciliation process, but the results are mixed. In some cases it is reported that the reconciliation consisted only of speeches and kisses (Dikhliah, al-Koshh). In other cases the Christians claim they were forced into reconciliation (Bimha, Isna). Other reports indicate that tension thereafter returns to the area (Abu Fana, Nazlah), or that reconciliation did not prevent the resurrection of a blood feud (Abu Tisht). In fact, only four cases (Beni Walimis, Sidi Salem, Jabl al-Tayr, Izbet Girgis) report a reconciliation agreement without at least some media questioning the validity of the process.<sup>xxx</sup>

## *Opinions about Reconciliation Sessions*

As hinted at earlier there is much controversy surrounding the practice and legitimacy of reconciliation sessions as an alternative tool for resolving disputes. While some praise the concept other condemn it altogether, while still others suggest its usefulness if utilized properly. Due to the recent publicity involving the handling of these matters in conflicts involving Muslims and Christians, much of the divide in opinion follows confessional lines.

Naguib Gibraeel is chief among those who condemn reconciliation sessions in their entirety. He is a Coptic lawyer and the head of the Egyptian Union Human Rights Organization. He has represented the church in several cases and is outspoken in his efforts to discredit reconciliation sessions. He declares that these are outside the law, and therefore have no real standing. Even if a true agreement is reached, either party can abandon it without legal consequence. The occurrence of reconciliation sessions is a clear example, he declares, of the weakness of the state. It is because the government is either unable or unwilling to enforce the rule of law that these sessions take place. It is more egregious when the state undermines its own role by forcing parties into such 'reconciliation'. This allows the state to claim the triumph of social religious harmony without having to do the work of actual governance. The appearance of unity is maintained, but in reality this process contributes to the further deterioration of interreligious relations. The Muslims who are bent on exerting their superiority have realized that they are able to commit aggression and escape the wrath of the law, as all parties are pardoned following the reconciliation agreement. The only solution is full application of the law in all circumstances under the principle of citizenship. Anything less, declares Gibraeel, is unacceptable, and leads to the weakening of the state and the jeopardizing the safety of Copts and other minorities.<sup>xxx</sup>

Many Copts echo these sentiments. In fact, a recent book published by *Watani* newspaper has highlighted many of these faults in the recent cases which have occurred. Entitled "Customary Reconciliation Sessions and the Copts", the subtitle provides all the commentary necessary: "Giving Victory to the Perpetrator and Trampling upon the Victim".<sup>xxxii</sup> Bishop Marcos of the diocese Shubra el-Kheima has stated that in the current case of Nag Hamadi having witnessed travesties after previous reconciliation attempts, Copts should refrain from entering into such negotiations until all compensation payments have been granted and justice meted out to the criminals. Though Bishop Bisanti of the diocese of Helwan allows for the possibility of legitimate traditional solutions, he believes that these are often false and thus useless.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Throughout Egypt many Copts are now insisting on the execution of justice before attempts at reconciliation, and the Nag Hamadi incident has only served to strengthen their resolve.

This does not mean, however, that all Christians in Egypt find customary reconciliation sessions to be useless. Testimony obtained through a questionnaire we distributed to the priests of bishopric of Beba and el-Fashn in the governorate of Beni Suef that certain priests find reconciliation sessions to be an important tool in keeping community peace. Fr. Armiya Makram Shafiq of Izbet al-Azhari and Fr. Yunan Bushra

Shakir of Iqfahs, indicate that in these areas Christians and Muslims enter freely into reconciliation, which result in satisfaction on both sides.<sup>xxxiv</sup> It should be noted, however, that both of these priests preside over areas with Christian majorities; it may be questioned if the Christian minority experience is as favorable. Further study is necessary to extend this conclusion, as well as to explore why such experiences have maintained community peace. For now, however, it is sufficient to demonstrate that now prevailing Coptic sentiment is squarely against the reconciliation session as a community tool.

Yet it is true that Muslim sentiment seems to be less opposed. While some Copts declare this to be obvious since as a majority and as the off-perpetrators of aggression the reconciliation sessions are geared toward their interest, this does not necessarily need to be the case. The *Dar al-Ifta'*, the national center for issuing Islamic legal opinions, hosts reconciliation sessions on a weekly basis. Here, generally for business or family disputes, Muslims decide to bypass litigation in favor of a religious ruling issued by a qualified scholar. Though not legally binding, both parties approach in fear of God and in agreement to be bound by the decision, no matter on which side the lot is cast.<sup>xxxv</sup> By all appearances this is a healthy situation derived from both cultural and religious norms.

Prof. Muhammad Misbah al-Qadi is the dean of law at Helwan University, and he defends reconciliation sessions as being able to adjudicate certain matters in which the law fails. At times these can bring people back together, for not all disputes require the intervention of the law.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Furthermore Dr. Rifaat Ahmad, head of the Jaffa Center, states that reconciliation sessions can lift a significant burden off the legal system, which is awash in cases. He believes that the benefit of these sessions consists of the administration of quick justice, as opposed to the time-consuming and costly procedures in the courts. They also mesh better with the culture of many tribes and peoples in Egypt, and have Islamic roots that can unite all Muslims. Answering Coptic charges, however, he admits that they can damage the authority of the law and called for multi-disciplinary study to craft the best arrangements. In addition, Copts are correct in declaring reconciliation sessions to be invalid if there is any indication of compulsion. Both parties must be free to enter in to these discussions, and free to leave at any point before crafting an agreement. If both sides cannot agree outside the law, then the law must rule. Dr. Ahmad does anticipate, however, the eventual incorporation of customary reconciliation sessions into the fabric of the law, which he believes will be a positive step, allowing many issues to be settled independently and avoiding the controversies which have recently arisen.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

### *The Legal Basis of Reconciliation*

The shadow of the law lingers upon the practice of reconciliation sessions, begging the question of what is the legal status, if any, of reconciliation processes in Egypt. Many Copts assert that they are outside the law entirely; are they correct?

Marwan al-Ashaal of the legal firm of Amir al-Mirghani has written a legal study of the issue of reconciliation. In it he describes that there are only three acknowledged channels for reconciliation in the Egyptian legal codes, and these are of only limited application. The first has to do with administrative disputes between a citizen and the

public institutions of government. Should a dispute arise in the case of taxes, traffic violations, customs duties, etc., the law has decreed that a reconciliation session must occur before the court case convenes. The purpose of this law is to decrease the burden on the legal system so that the issue may be resolved before litigation. Yet while the process must take place, the agreement is not binding, so that the judge may overturn, modify, or ignore completely the decision taken between the two sides. Of course, he may also accept it, at which point it becomes registered through the courts and obligatory on both parties.

The second channel of legal reconciliation concerns marriage disputes. If a woman feels that she has been harmed by her husband but cannot produce evidence of this, the conflict may be submitted to an arbitration session, which can avoid the recourse to court should all be successful. Upon breakdown of these cordial sessions, however, the matter returns to the court which can decide upon divorce and determine the particulars in each individual case.

The third and final channel similarly is not reconciliation exactly but rather legal arbitration. Under limited circumstances two parties engaged in a commercial dispute may submit their case to arbitration, rather than to a formal court process. Though this is an emerging aspect of the legal system it is noteworthy that Egypt has not followed the pattern of alternative dispute resolution development in most of the world, which enshrines both arbitration and reconciliation in the legal code. Though arbitration is somewhat accessible, reconciliation, except in the cases listed above, is not.

This report confirms the accusations of many Copts that reconciliation sessions as currently conducted are outside of the law. It is debated to what extent Christians parties have been 'forced' into these reconciliation sessions, but were common understandings of legal reconciliation to be legislated in Egypt, compulsion would be forbidden, as the very concept of reconciliation requires free participation. Reconciliation, furthermore, should not prevent criminal proceedings against those accused of crimes on either side. The law calls for justice; should forgiveness be extended by the offended party, the state, legally, maintains its responsibility to prosecute. In addition, any agreement composed through a reconciliation session is not binding on either party, as there is no legal mechanism to either register it or enforce it. While customary or moral principles may be involved, under current Egyptian law, there is no legal basis for any agreed stipulations.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

### **Prognosis – Corrective Steps and Observations**

In the diagnosis section of this paper were identified the two main culprits in preventing true reconciliation from taking place between conflicting parties. These were the damaging effects of improper journalism and an improper use of reconciliation sessions. In the prognosis section the aim will be to discover helpful practices in promoting social peace. This section will explore the role of the state, the role of local religious leadership, the role of the media, and the role of non-governmental organizations. Missing from this list is the role of local community leadership, but this will be addressed in the following section featuring therapy.

It is important to emphasize at this juncture that our interest lies in maintaining and restoring peace in areas affected by conflict. Therefore, while arguing over interests one side may indeed have a more just claim over the other, or a better standing in reference to the law, our focus is on rebuilding relationships, not in adjudicating disputes. In the case of Izbet Bushra, for example, we have no stake or interest whether or not the Christian villagers ever receive permission to build a church. This is a local matter for local authorities to decide. Inasmuch as conflict remains divisive between the two parties it is near impossible for decisions to be made jointly in the interest of all. Ultimately it is a matter for the state, but to the degree community leaders agree on if, when, and where, these are things to be decided together. Therefore it is our hope to support local efforts for reconciliation of relationships, not necessarily disputes, so that the community may once again function in harmony. This also will be explained further in the section on therapy.

Nevertheless, in the prognosis section we have identified several corrective steps which will better lead toward peace. In some of these we will be able to have a supporting role, in others these are stated for observation and adoption by other parties. In working jointly from many directions we hope that a culture of peace might be restored as the natural and, in the eyes of many, historical pattern of Egyptian life.

### **The Role of the State**

The role of the state is obviously one in which we have no input, and we seek none. Rather, we recognize the legitimate efforts of those in authority, both national and local, to encourage national unity, strengthen and extend the reach of the law, and pacify areas torn apart by violent strife. As concerns this last point in particular the first and most necessary activity is to stop people from fighting. There is not sufficient time during a crisis to establish guilt, and it becomes incumbent on the security to remove from the scene all who appear to be involved in the altercation. The details of their case are to be decided later by proper police and judicial proceedings.

The state has an important role to play concerning the next step—the restoration of community. It can be argued that during an altercation it is not always clear who the guilty parties are. Furthermore, even if one section of the community appears to be more at fault than others, the law cannot punish a group, only individuals. Yet determining individual guilt in a mass action is not simple.<sup>xxxix</sup>

The protests of the harmed party are also received with sympathy, for it seems that justice is lacking if none are punished, or punished to a significant degree where evidence is insufficient to merit further sanction. In cases such as these the state can find alternative resolution patterns such as the reconciliation sessions to be an attractive option. It allows the leaders of the two parties to discuss their situation amicably, and determine a solution acceptable to all. In supporting this possibility we do not make comment on the actual practices of reconciliation as experienced recently, conducted under the auspices of the state. This requires supervisory review which is outside the scope of this paper. Rather, while we do not condemn altogether the resort to reconciliation sessions when necessary, we do agree that in all cases participation

must be voluntary and the law must never be neglected, even in cases where one party forgives the other. For the good of the state the law must rule and be respected by all

Therefore, while reconciliation sessions can be useful, the state must not use them to escape the responsibilities of its position. Justice must be applied where there has been aggression; culprits must be punished where the law has been broken. Where these sessions are employed each party must be free to enter in or leave the proceedings as per their will. Upon such an incident the law must step in to adjudicate. Currently there has been a focus on hugging and kissing following superficial agreements to give the appearance of reconciliation. Where successful agreements are concluded these are not improper, but the focus must be on long term restoration of relationships, not simple embraces of the moment. This requires trust in the state to enforce the law, upon which can be rebuilt the trust local leaders and villagers have in one another. Though the government must pay careful attention to monitor further tensions, true reconciliation leaves these as isolated incidents which will not break the resolve of leaders to maintain community harmony.

### **The Role of Local Religious Leadership**

The first statement necessary in considering the role of local religious leadership is that it pertains mostly to conflict between the two religious communities. Where disputes occur either between Christians alone or Muslims alone it is generally sufficient to leave each to their accepted authorities, as much Egyptian legislation already does in the adjudication of family law, for example. Other times, when two distinct cultures, non-religious in nature, are involved in conflict, such as between farmers and tribal communities, if both share the same Islamic faith then the conflict is obviously not religious but social, economic, or political. In these instances the requisite authorities should be consulted. Local religious leadership can still have a say in the promotion of peace, but they do not stand at the center of the conflict, and the consideration of their role does not need further comment.

As many conflicts, however, do involve a Muslim and a Christian party the religious element is often invoked. We believe this to be a mistake in many instances, for the original dispute is often far from being religious in nature; rather it is found in the normal and ordinary offenses that occur in the course of life. Yet as these offenses due become sectarian as they exasperate, the local religious leadership of both sides becomes involved, and can either limit the impact of the dispute or else aid in its escalation. As such, their role is worthy of study.

#### *The Influence of Local Priests and Imams*

This sentiment, however, is not universally accepted, for there are those who question the real influence men of religion have on the day to day events, let alone the larger decisions of a local community. Osama al-Ghazoly is a retired journalist who has noted that often both priests and imams are appointed from outside the area, and therefore are not established as 'sons' of the community which they serve. Furthermore, they are rarely esteemed as community leaders; this honor goes instead to the heads of

families and business leaders who hold greater sway over the decisions and ultimate success of a community. While they do maintain religious influence, in the case of Islam they are appointees of the Ministry of Endowments, and are best compared to minor civil servants. While due to the organizational structure and hierarchal nature of the church a priest may be attributed more authority, in both the Muslim and the Christian case it is fair to question the influence they truly possess.<sup>xi</sup>

Dr. Rifaat Ahmad disagrees. He does support the notion that community leaders should be in the forefront of maintaining and rebuilding peace in an area, but believes that local religious figures have far more influence than local politicians. This is due mainly to the increased sense of identity that most Egyptians have to their religion, but it pushes both priests and imams to think in terms of their community role. He believes that if religious leaders take joint responsibility for inter-communal peace that this will go a long way to preventing conflict. If both sides keep to their own communities, however, the condition is ripe for trouble. Such is the power of religion either for good or for ill.<sup>xii</sup>

Rev. Safwat al-Baiadi, president of the Protestant Community Council, in which all Protestant churches of Egypt cooperate, moderates between the two views. Again esteeming the primary role of community leaders, he does label Egypt as an essentially religious society. The strong attachment to religion, however, does not necessarily translate either into morality or attendance at a house of worship. Both Muslims and Christians have been found to commit heinous crimes for religious reasons, but these perpetrators are rarely found in either the mosque or the church. So on the one hand, if an imam or priest wishes to speak a message, it may be uttered to only the portion that already believe it; the Egyptian outside the religious structures will remain either unaware or else actively ignorant of the sermon. On the other hand, those inside the structures do attach great importance to the words of their religious leaders. Among these he maintains great influence. Therefore, one should not overestimate the power of religious leaders in their community, but to dismiss them as unimportant would be counterproductive. Their cooperation in building peace can only be helpful.<sup>xiii</sup>

We believe that the situation of local religious leadership in Egypt is an area that is diverse and multifaceted, of which we have much to learn, and which in every case will be determined by the locality in which tension has occurred. We do not seek to deemphasize their community role, as we recognize the place of religion in the community setting. On the other hand, we do not want to overly focus our attention on them and risk minimizing the role of non-religious local leaders. There is a balance to be sought for which we must depend on those who know the situation well. Each case will be unique.

#### *Reasons for Necessary Christian Initiative*

Having proposed, then, at least a minimal threshold for the importance of local religious leadership, our analysis will turn mostly to the Christian side of this equation, though it will be seen that this is always in conjunction with their Muslim counterparts. The first reason for this emphasis on the Christian party is that as the numerical minority in Egypt the Copts must be proactive in order to establish, maintain, and preserve their participation in society. While citizenship principles are enshrined in the Constitution and

religious distinction is not the norm in the official government discourse, if the Copts on their part fail to live up to these ideals they can find themselves marginalized. There has been a tendency since the 1970s for the Copts to respond to felt discrimination by further withdrawing from society. Whereas the Muslim majority can maintain its existence and achieve success without thought about the Christians, the reverse is not true. A future for Copts in Egypt necessitates healthy interaction with all Muslims.

The second reason to emphasize the Christian part of this equation is the structural distinction between Christianity and Islam, namely, the organizational power of the church. Whereas the mosque in Islam may support a number of social functions it is primarily a place of prayer, and the imam, though potentially influential through his skills as an orator, is not necessarily a community organizer. The Orthodox Church, however, is a hierarchical organization which unites the village farmer to a confessional priest, then to an area bishop, and finally to his holiness the pope. Many Christians find their entire social life centered around the activities of the church, upon which they are dependent spiritually. By contrast, though the mosque is a necessary part of Islam, it is not a structure on which the Muslim is similarly dependent. Furthermore, in Egyptian Islam the imam is a civil servant and as such is an extension of the state, whereas the Christian priest is an employee only of the church. For all of these reasons the church is able to mobilize the activity of peace more organically than the mosque, which would rely more heavily on sermonizing.

#### *Practices Promoting Good Community Relations*

Many of our observations about corrective church practice stem from a questionnaire which was answered by sixteen priests from the bishopric of Beba and el-Fashn. Under the authority of the bishop these priests were asked a number of questions about their community and their relations with Muslims, especially in light of the incident which took place in Izbet Bushra. While the reader is cautioned that this survey was not scientific and lacks an adequate sample size from which to draw definitive conclusions, many patterns were detected which would be helpful for a community priest to consider in the endeavor of maintaining peaceful relations, even during disputes.

Of these sixteen priests fourteen answered the question about the state of relations in the village. While four described these relations as deteriorating, the rest stated they were either improving or positively stable. The interesting response with which to compare this response is the subsequent question about his personal relationship with the community imam. In nine of the ten cases where relations were good the priest maintained a good relationship with Muslim counterparts, in the tenth case there was simply no answer. By contrast where relations were seen to be deteriorating only one priest stated that he had a good relationship with the imam. While there are certainly other factors to consider, there is a clear correspondence between the incidence of peace and a relationship of peace between religious leaders.

A second observation from the questionnaire pertains directly to the case of Izbet Bushra, but also to Christian practice in general. Five of the surveyed priests reported the presence of unregistered churches in their communities. Whereas in Izbet



Bushra this led to a confrontation between the two religious communities, each of the five priests reports that the relations in their area are positive. Furthermore, each reports also a good relationship with the imam or other Muslim leaders. Therefore in the case of church building, even if the difficult registration procedures hinder the building of an authorized church, good community relations can allow for the existence of 'unofficial' houses for prayer. More along these lines concerning official church building will be described in the section on therapy.

A third observation posits a correlation, natural to be sure, between good community relations and the presence of shared projects between the two religious communities. In every case where positive relations are reported there exist shared projects, such as schools, hospitals, clinics, and development societies. The one priest who declares no such projects exist also reports deteriorating relations, as do the three priests who failed to answer the question. Again, while absolute statements should be avoided, it appears that proactive Christian participation in society produces a situation that leads toward healthy community interaction.

A final observation links the existence of communal peace with the practice of dealing with clashes. In four cases the priests respond that their primary method is to rely on God. While this appears to be a worthy attitude for a priest, only one of these four enjoys good relations in his area, while the other three describe a situation of deteriorating relations. Two of the priests respond the primary method is to complain to officials. Here the results are mixed; one enjoys positive relations, but for the other they are worsening. Of the five priests, however, who state their primary method of dealing with clashes consists of community cooperation, all five report good relations between the two communities. Even if the attitude is derived from the situation, rather than the other way around, it is still a powerful correlation to report.

All of these factors suggest strongly that church leadership at every level, and especially the local, should actively encourage its Christians to participate in society. While the crafting of good relations is somewhat natural in day to day community life as work, school, and projects create points of intersection for Muslims and Christians, an attitude of commonality must be promoted over an attitude of withdrawal and seclusion. Furthermore, the church should emphasize to its priests the importance of maintaining a real relationship with the Muslim community leadership. Exchanging holiday visits over Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter, and Muslim holidays such as *Eid al-Adha* and *Eid al-Fitr* is a good and practical first step. Building upon this, however, would encourage leaders to regularly meet together and discuss jointly the needs and disputes of their community. By modeling a healthy relationship both priest and imam will create an atmosphere which makes the deterioration of relationships a much less likely scenario.<sup>xliii</sup>

### *Removal of Religious Leadership*

Another corrective step which can aid in the restoration of positive relationships is drawn from the experience of Izbet Bushra. Though this may be a painful suggestion to be used only as a last resort, the removal of local religious leadership can sometimes help restore peace to a community.

During a visit to Izbet Bushra in January 2010 we heard the claims of the Muslim community, joined by Christian leaders in their presence, that normal relations had returned to the village. A phone call to the village priest confirmed this announcement. The priest in question, however, was different from the one who had presided over the Christian community during the building of the church/residence and the subsequent conflict which developed. Muslims of the village declared that the original priest was the source of all the troubles in the village, but now that he has been replaced they have positive interactions with the current priest, and state that the situation now is fine.

The local Muslim leaders also spoke that the former priest taught hatred toward the Muslim neighbors, but that this provoked an equal response from the imam in the mosque. A senior religious leader, however, formerly the imam, contacted the local branch of the Ministry of Endowments to remove these preachers from their mosque. This was done, he said, more than once during the tenure of the former priest.<sup>xliv</sup>

During the phone call with the new priest, who began his service in the village shortly after the agreement issued by the reconciliation sessions, he did not lay such blame on his predecessor, though of course he was not there. He viewed the priest's acceptance of his transfer as self-sacrifice so as to pave the way for eventual approval of the church. He indicated the removal of the priest was at the initiative of security, not the church, but he did report generally good relations between the two sides. The only failing, he said, is the continued delay in authorization to transform a designated and approved structure into a church. Unfortunately, to date we have been unable to reach the former priest by telephone to further inquire about these comments.<sup>xlv</sup>

Even so, indications suggest, though not definitively, that the former priest was a divisive figure in the community. He may have had the intention to win a church for his village no matter the cost, and placed little value on the construction of relations with his Muslim neighbors. The church would do well to monitor situations like this, and when necessary, transfer priests from their location of trouble. Upon testimony of the Muslim community, it appears they did the same with activist preachers who sowed discord from the mosque. Part of the role of local religious leadership may occasionally involve their removal from the scene.

#### *Reconciliation along Religious Lines?*

One final question to consider pertaining to local religious leadership is whether or not the process of reconciliation should take place along religious lines. It is understood that both Christianity and Islam contain impetus toward reconciliation of conflicting parties.<sup>xlvi</sup> It is not certain, however, that these impetuses can mesh together into a common discourse. Certain efforts have been constructed by the US Institute for Peace, which has designed a course in interreligious reconciliation.<sup>xlvii</sup> The United Religions Initiative has produced a peacemaking guide along these lines.<sup>xlviii</sup> What is not clear is if these laudable efforts, designed by Western minds attuned toward pluralism and a lack of absolute dogma, can find any traction in Egyptian society. Further study is necessary to establish cultural translation.<sup>xlix</sup>

Dr. Amin Makram Ebeid is one Egyptian who would discourage such attempts. He is an elderly Copt who has worked as both a surgeon and a writer, and witnessed many attempts at building bridges between Muslims and Christians. Though he esteems these efforts, he understands Islam and Christianity to be far too distant in their understandings of God and humanity to be made the platform on which to build good relations.<sup>i</sup> These religions are to be respected and practiced, as each can lead its adherent toward piety in fear of God. He believes, however, that they cannot be reconciled together. Instead, efforts to bring reconciliation to people must be built on their common humanity. Both religions assert this origin, so the idea is not antithetical to faith. Nevertheless, it is best for the health of Egypt and its many local communities that religious language not be employed in the service of unity and reconciliation, for it contains too much power instead to divide. Our human bond experienced in a shared homeland is a far surer foundation.<sup>ii</sup>

In summary, therefore, local religious leadership has an important role to play in securing both peace and reconciliation in Egyptian communities. The extent of their influence is both open to question and variable, as is the benefit of striving for reconciliation along religious lines. What is clearer is the necessity for both sides, but especially the Christian due to numerical factors, to take positive actions toward the integration of each religious community with the other. When shared relationships are created and valued it becomes more difficult to cast them aside during a dispute, preventing the escalation of a simple conflict of interest into a sectarian struggle.

### **The Role of the Media**

The deficiencies of the Egyptian media have been discussed extensively in the section on diagnosis, leaving here a treatment of the correct principles to guide their work, as well as the share they may have in building peace and understanding in a community. The journalists who participated in our workshop, representing major newspapers of Egypt, decided upon several principles of balanced and objective reporting, to which they will adhere and encourage among their colleagues. These include that a journalist should never rely on only one source, and must base all reports on information, not speculation. The journalist should also find diverse, credible sources, and inform readers if a source declines to comment. Furthermore, the journalist should always demonstrate to sources his trustworthiness. By keeping to these standards they will fulfill the medical dictum—do no harm—and present an accurate picture of any story on which they report.

The question of media involvement in the building and promotion of peace is somewhat more complicated, for it is established that as a principle journalists should report the news and not participate in it. Nevertheless, the process of reporting necessarily entails involvement to some degree, and if journalists can be educated as to the importance of peacemaking then their conduct may be informed through this positive bias. Concerning the reporting of conflict the journalists of our workshop agreed that in terms of the multiple parties involved during times of conflict, they should not take sides in a dispute, but keep to moral and ethical standards. The media should also serve as a peacekeeper, rather than a divisive element during disputes. In doing so it will demonstrate to the community the important role of the press, and help stabilize

areas with tensions. They can also seek non-governmental organizations as sources, as these tend to be focused on the necessity of community harmony, and as such will report about possible tensions with less bias, as will be discussed below. In all of these principals the media will stay in the background, as is necessary for the profession, but yet play a contributing role to the promotion of communal peace.<sup>iii</sup>

### **The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations**

Estimates range that there are between 15,000 and 24,000<sup>iii</sup> registered non-governmental organizations in Egypt, of which only around 500 are active.<sup>iv</sup> This number indicates that civil society in Egypt is to be considered as weak, with minimal participation from the average citizen. There are many initiatives, both national and international, working on the promotion and strengthening of civil society, and this is a worthy goal for achieving social peace and harmony. While debates range as to the optimal level of religious participation in the crafting of civil society, it is clear that both Muslim and Christian involvement is necessary. While currently the discourse on crafting civil society is led by secular and Christian voices, the NGOs which exist represent all sectors of society, religious and otherwise.<sup>v</sup>

While the quality of each NGO is to be gauged individually, in general the NGOs which are active provide necessary service and support to the communities they represent, and have won the confidence of many in their regions. Naturally, each NGO tends to keep to its area of expertise; a center focused on literacy will not readily judge the cleanliness of water, nor will an initiative to distribute food to the poor comment on development work. What is unfortunate, however, is that the levels of communication and cooperation between NGOs of differing emphasis parallel this reticence to work outside one's expertise. During times of peace and stability this lack of coordination is of little consequence; it is when conflict erupts that its effects are felt.

The incidence of conflict threatens the ability of NGOs to carry out their work, but the scope of conflict can be contained through judicious leveraging of NGO relationships in the community. This insight was provided by Dr. Baha Bakry, president of Sinai University, who has extensive experience in working with NGOs and civil conflicts. He stated that the key to solving community crisis lies in activating the social power of NGOs. Whereas a conflict may split a community along tribal, religious, or commercial lines, the NGO serves members of the community across every sector of society. Though not necessarily every NGO is this broad, the NGO community in cooperation can remind a divided population about its common needs and responsibilities. The NGOs can hold a community together while other forces threaten to tear it apart.<sup>vi</sup>

In exploration of this idea we aimed to conduct a workshop for NGOs in the region of Beni Suef, in order to learn from them their experiences of conflict, as well as to begin to knit together this influential section of society, which serves the area around Izbet Bushra, though no NGO currently was active there. Circumstances dictated the last-minute transfer of this workshop to Cairo, which nevertheless resulted in many important findings. Dr. Bakry presided over the sessions, during which he urged the NGO community to make itself the 'fifth authority' in Egyptian society, following the three branches of government and the media.

During these sessions the participants agreed that the strengthening of civil society in general is vital in preventing future conflicts, and that NGOs have a major role in this regard, especially as they operate within and promote the values of citizenship. Unemployment should be addressed, for those without work are more likely than others to clash when disputes arise. Youth services are also important, as the younger generation must be educated in the principles of peace and social solidarity. Each area of activity was esteemed as necessary, but people agreed that it was in the coordination of activity that their power and influence was maximized.

Ties with the media must also be promoted, the participants recognized, for their objective and unbiased commitment to community harmony would provide a valuable source for journalists to lean upon. In addition to the sincerity with which they would speak, NGOs often know better than others the true origins of conflict as well as the story of how it escalated. It would benefit society, they agreed, if each NGO became a regional media center with strong links to the provincial press.<sup>lvii</sup>

There exists much space for increased participation from NGOs in Egyptian society. The trend, however, is toward further creation of viable civic organizations, each of which will add to the web of networks which crisscross the Egyptian landscape. If existing regional NGOs are able to form links of communication and cooperation, newcomers to this scene can only add to the depth of strength in each community. By utilizing their good reputation and service extension networks, it is hoped that NGOs can be a key force in limiting the incidence of violent conflict, and in containing it quickly when it does occur.

## **Outside Perspectives**

The roles and corrective steps so far have all originated from within Egypt, as is appropriate, given that these are internal Egyptian issues. In recent instances of conflict nearly every level of Egyptian society has rejected out of hand that solutions or oversight be orchestrated from abroad. In our project we agree with this sentiment. Though foreigners are involved in our organization we insist on operating on our basis as a registered Egyptian NGO, whose activities are undertaken with broad support from an Egyptian team of advisors. Nevertheless, we do see that at times foreign experiences can benefit Egyptian issues, if they are properly translated into the proper cultural context. It is in this hope that these observations are offered below.

### *Egyptian Patterns of Conflict Resolution*

The first analysis comes from Prof. John Murray, former professor of political science at the American University of Cairo. Though an outsider to Egypt he closely studied its patterns of conflict resolution, so as to add to his Western based understanding of this discipline. His paper is entitled "The Cairo Stories", in which he selected three examples of conflict resolution in Egypt, one relating to a Muslim-Christian incident not unlike Izbet Bushra, one concerning the struggle between development and archaeological preservation, and the third a political issue between the government and the journalist syndicate. From these examples he sought to leave

behind his prejudicial Western education about conflict resolution, and instead concentrate on the methods and principles Egyptians utilize during times of struggle. Specifically he identified six characteristics:

First, there is an acceptance in Islamic society that life involves continuous struggle. While this is true especially between religions, it also extends to group relations in many other settings as well. As such, conflict is inevitable and not necessarily negative. It only becomes negative when it upsets the social order or puts lives in danger. This is because Islamic culture also places a high value on harmony, and when the generally accepted rules of society are violated, struggle exceeds its acceptable bounds, and resolution must occur. Resolution, however, is not achieved by balancing the interests of the parties in conflict, but by restoring the original situation. While this will result in some groups receiving less than they seek—usually the minority party outside of the power structures—the winner-loser attitude reflects the prevailing attitude that struggle is continual, and competition is healthy.

Second, there is a high stakes threshold to conflict. Since struggle is perceived as continuous, most conflicts are part of the background noise of everyday life. In order for a party to generate interest in their struggle, they must frame their issues in the starkest terms possible, even if resorting to exaggeration. While there is considerable risk involved—this process heightens the tension and disrupts society—it is the only way to attract attention to the cause.

Third, Egyptian conflict resolution reflects the idea of an integrated past. In many Western understandings the past is only important to know background; it is the current struggle which must be understood in order to achieve a lasting, future solution. Egyptian society, however, preserves its culture and history, which constantly informs the present struggle. Whereas this can blind both parties to discover potential forward-looking solutions, it also demands that solutions employed are compatible with historic processes. In this light, solutions, once achieved, may be more likely to hold socially.

Fourth, sacrificing for principle is a valuable tool for resolving conflict. This is seen as different than compromise. In compromising each party gives in to the demands of the other, designating weakness. A sacrifice, however, is never compelled but rather is freely given. This allows the party to save face and maintain a position of strength vis-à-vis their opponent, but yet reach an understanding which restores community harmony.

Fifth, there is an attractiveness of third parties. When two groups are locked into a struggle, for many of the above reasons extrication is difficult. A third party, on the other hand, can come with neutrality to the conflict and bring otherwise absent resources to the table. These can involve moral or financial strength, but with it comes a responsibility to protect both sides and consistently push them towards reconciliation. If the third party is competent the original combatants can yield to their leadership without losing face in a way that is very difficult to achieve by face-to-face negotiation.

Sixth, Arab culture values strength in leadership. This principle is not entirely different than principle five, but to be added is the understanding that Arab societies tend to be top-down in organization, without intermediaries or sharing of power and

responsibility. Therefore, there is rarely a 'system' to which conflict resolution can refer; instead the resolution is dependent on a powerful leader who can marshal what is necessary to achieve a solution. Though this process does not preclude the leader's seeking of expert advice, in the end he alone owns the success or failure of the operation. Conflict resolution can rarely occur without this powerful intermediary.<sup>lviii</sup>

Samir Marcos, a prominent Coptic author and commentator, and Osama al-Ghazoly, a respected journalist and columnist, have questioned these findings, especially the third and fourth. Many local Egyptians have little concept of the past and its attachment to the present; this, it is argued, is the domain of cultured and intellectual Egyptians, not the normal farmers, traders, and Bedouin who find themselves embroiled in conflict from time to time. Furthermore, the idea of sacrifice was not supported, as Egyptian life in nearly all facets is an example of continual negotiation. Nevertheless, other of his ideas were confirmed, especially concerning elevating one's issue above the background of continual conflict, as well as the importance of third parties and strong leadership. Initiatives which help to promote peacemaking in Egypt would do well not to categorically adopt the perspective of anyone, but that of Prof. Murray can be helpful to guide and test many proposals.

#### *An Early Warning System*

Another useful perspective comes far from Egypt but yet from the African continent, from the experience of Nigeria. In this nation Muslims and Christians represent roughly 50% each of the population, and have witnessed several bloody exchanges of violence in recent years. Militias from each side regularly conduct raids in which they attack even the innocents of the other religion. James Wuye was one such militia member on the Christian side, and Muhammad Ishafa was an imam who regularly prayed curses upon his Christian enemies.

In the course of time, Wuye repented of his use of violence in the name of Christianity, and this was largely due to the forgiveness which first took hold of Ishafa's heart and then proceeded to touch his adversary. After he later became pastor of a church the two then partnered together to commit themselves to lead their adversarial parties toward reconciliation, forswearing violence and building firm bonds of peace. They began to travel throughout Nigeria preaching this message, and now carry it throughout the world. In 2009 they visited Alexandria and presented their story to the Egyptian people.<sup>lix</sup>

Nigeria is certainly not Egypt. In no stretch of the imagination is Egypt on the brink of civil war, nor are their similar atrocities committed against opposing religious communities on a regular basis. Nevertheless, a basic principle of the message of forgiveness and acceptance can be translated into the Egyptian context, as can the practical call for creation of an 'early warning system' that characterizes the method of the imam and the pastor, as they are called, in preventing conflict throughout their country.

Egypt has recently witnessed the horrors of violence in Nag Hamadi, which many observers trace to an earlier conflict in the nearby village of Farshut. Regardless of the

accuracy of the connection between the two events, they were connected in popular understanding, fed through rumor and conjecture, and palpable in both the press and local society. Had there been an early warning system in place, perhaps this controversy could have been addressed earlier, and the incident of Nag Hamadi been prevented. While this is all conjecture it does aid the understanding that such a system could be useful.

We have invited the imam and the pastor back to Egypt in 2010 to lead training sessions on creating an early warning system, to be then translated in light of Egyptian realities. It is our hope that the lessons gained from this training will be able to be taught and transferred to many regional centers throughout Egypt. Though a preventative measure, it has the potential to obviate after-the-fact peace building and reconciliation efforts which we and others will still seek to promote.

### *International Examples*

Finally, our project has begun the process of collecting other examples of peacemaking and reconciliation from around the world. We have accessed the material of the Berghorf Institute<sup>lx</sup>, Global Peacebuilders<sup>lxi</sup>, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict<sup>lxii</sup>, the Lebanon Conflict Resolution Network<sup>lxiii</sup>, the Jordan-based Regional Center of Conflict Prevention<sup>lxiv</sup>, and Peacebuilders Community of the Philippines<sup>lxv</sup>, among others. We plan to continue to search for other examples and study these more deeply in the coming year.

### **Therapy – How to Address Conflict**

The introduction to this paper declared that conflict in all countries, including Egypt, is natural; while true, it should be added that in the case of Egypt, violent conflict is not. The perceived increase in violent conflict, however, indicates that the normal mechanisms in Egyptian society are failing to address the natural disputes which have always been handled inside the system. This does not suggest that new solutions must come from outside, but that a fresh evaluation of the situation is necessary. It is not that the old ways have failed; rather there must be new applications of the traditional methods which have always been employed. It is hoped that our project may be a catalyst in this process.

There are three obvious stages for addressing conflict in Egypt: Before, during, and after. The 'before' stage acknowledges that prevention is the best cure. If society can be better constituted to process disputes and prepared to deal with possible escalation, then the incidence of violent conflict can be avoided. The 'during' stage represents the rapid activity necessary to deal with the emergence of conflict, whether it be initiated in violence or seemingly on the verge. It addresses the question of who are the key players and how can the incident be contained. The 'after' stage is variable in its application, as primary security concerns may dictate when intervention may take place. Once begun, however, it addresses the questions of why—what are the root causes of this dispute, and how—what is necessary to put the community back together. Proper therapy of Egyptian conflict requires attention be given to all three stages.



## **Before**

The 'before' stage is a bit of an anomaly in that it cannot be directed at an area of conflict—conflict has not occurred yet. Therefore the activities during this stage are designed to be general in application but specific in location, and designed to effectuate a change in culture. While the two emphases below are useful anywhere, they would best be conducted in Upper Egypt, where, as indicated, many conflicts occur and fewer resources are allocated toward their alleviation. The first emphasis focuses on the importance of community relations, and the second on the necessity of training.

### *Improving Community Relations*

The above two sections on diagnosis and prognosis have exposed a widening rift between Muslims and Christians in Egypt. This rift should not be overstated as being one of tension or distrust, especially not of an adversarial nature. On the contrary, throughout Egypt the two religious communities share a common culture in a common geographical space, interdependent on one another. What has been witnessed more recently, however, is an increasing identity with one's own group and an attitudinal shift of dependence on one's own. This has not been greatly translated into different activity; instead it is a mindset of negativity. Many Christians will speak among themselves of their 'persecution' and 'discrimination'. Many Muslims will speak among themselves of Christian 'isolation', appeals to the West to aid Christians in Egypt, and disproportional representation among Egypt's elite and middle class. It is not that either side is wholly incorrect; it is simply that the particular discourse has become unbalanced. It is within this oppositional attitude which conflict has fertile ground for escalation.

This mindset has not always been present; even in modern times there have been examples of individuals who have transformed their communities through positive interaction. One such person was the late Bishop Athanasius of the bishopric of Beni Suef (bishop from 1962-2000). While many in the church were suffering through increased pressures from extremist Islamic elements in the recent decades and responded with activism in securing personal, religious, and community rights, Bishop Athanasius chose a different track. He directed the activity of the church into increased participation in community affairs. He established development societies which served both religious communities without discrimination. He cultivated relationships with area leaders—governmental, religious, and community. When troubles occurred he was able to intervene, and was given respect as a wise leader himself, one who cared for the concerns of all.

It is natural to imagine the positive transformation his life had on the communities of Beni Suef, addressing issues of poverty and underdevelopment while knitting Egypt's two religions together. What is remarkable is the particular benefit his style of administration had on his own community. Whenever there was a Christian who was considering conversion to Islam, Bishop Athanasius was not only allowed but invited by the official governmental representatives to intervene and counsel the person in

question.<sup>lxvi</sup> Furthermore, under his leadership the church was able to build, renovate, or expand over seventy churches during his time of service.<sup>lxvii</sup> These are two areas in which many Copts most complain about their religious difficulties. From the example of Bishop Athanasius, the best remedy is to positively interact with the community at all levels. From here, one may win the respect from which to address other issues.

An imagined scenario of this benefit can be seen in consideration of Nag Hamadi. The area priest mentioned above is Fr. Yu'annis, who through positive contacts with security was able to transform Bishop Athanasius' good will into the realization of over twenty Christian projects in light of Muslim realities and interests.<sup>lxviii</sup> Fr. Yu'annis has spoken that from a social position in good standing a priest like himself could speak into a conflict, such as witnessed recently, so violently, in Nag Hamadi. First, he would visit his governmental relations and seek to learn. What has happened and what are you going to do about it? His presence and questions would be treated seriously because he has proven himself to the authorities. Second, he would approach the community Muslim leadership, and put a hard question to them. What share do you have in this atrocity which has occurred? This would be asked sensitively in ways which he knows how, asking tough questions without the use of offensive language, accusations, and generalizations. Instead, in asking for facts and intervention on behalf of peace, the experience he has gained in previous relation with them would both guide the question and their reception of it. Together, they could find the best answer.

Third, he would address his own people, telling them to resist the temptation toward revenge, overcoming it with love, patience, and forgiveness. 'Christian' revenge here would not mean the use of weapons, but rather angry and potentially violent demonstrations, slogans against the government or Islam, and appeals to the West to interfere on their behalf, interpreted by many Muslims as an effort to shame the nation. These features of 'revenge' must likewise be resisted. He would then urge them to renew again their efforts to participate fully in their local community. The act against them was isolated; it should not poison common community relationships.<sup>lxix</sup> Through these efforts a greater crisis can be avoided, but only built upon solid relationships. Due to our distance from the area and current inability to visit, we are unaware if the local leadership is of this nature; yet we are hopeful that such good may come from such stark evil.

The initiative on which to build is the presentation of this method. It may be that certain sections of the church would be open to receive training for their priests and parishes which would communicate this message. Selected religious figures, lay or clergy, could be selected and equipped to make a presentation containing encouragement and examples as given above. A similar effort could identify Muslim religious leaders who could address their community in the proper understanding of diversity in community from religious sources. This, however, is far too dependent on the will of the individual religious communities, but may also be seen as inappropriate for a neutral, non-affiliated NGO. Rather, the message of community integration may be better targeted at civil society, with all religious leadership invited to attend.<sup>lxx</sup>

*Training for Skills and Building a Network*

The matter of training may find easier acceptance, as sectarian proposals receive higher levels of guardedness from Egyptian authorities and many intellectuals. Instead, preventative therapy can focus on the training of NGO personnel to interact and lead their communities in solving disputes together before they get out of hand. Such training sessions, as described earlier, could be held in all the regional capitals of the Egyptian governorates. Independently or in conjunction, further training could be offered in the early warning system as proposed by the Nigerian imam and pastor. In addition, regionally or in Cairo, further journalist training can be repeated and built upon so that those who carry the news do so with integrity and professionalism. Providing them also with a media database and following up with regular media watch reports would also be helpful.

These training sessions would do well to coordinate with similar efforts, as there are other projects underway with similar goals, though different in application. One such project is run through the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS), currently working only with Christians, to train in conflict resolution techniques. This program coordinates with the Mennonite Central Committee to offer three stages of training, conducted both by local experts and visiting professors from the United States. Local Mennonite presence in Egypt also provides less systematic training, encouraging its foreign personnel to offer peace and reconciliation training within the scope of other projects, under the authority of the local Orthodox bishop. As such, this benefit also is currently available only for Christians.

A broader proposal is made by the Presbyterian Church of Egypt, which maintains Ramses College and a few other schools, as mentioned earlier. Though still under consideration from the authorities, the church would like to greatly expand its educational offerings, creating 'peace schools' throughout Egypt. The idea is have the school serve not only the children, but the entire community, becoming a regional center also for adult education. The curriculum in these schools would mesh with the national education system but also have a direct focus on teaching a culture of peace. Not only the students, but also teachers, administrators, and parents would be invited into the training and spirit of the school, open to both Muslims and Christians.<sup>lxxi</sup>

While these are the similar efforts we have currently identified, we maintain hope that we might discover other projects with which we may cooperate and learn from. Furthermore, there are individual people and NGOs we know who have conducted interventions in a particular conflict area. These are also a resource which we have considered, and have included in our NGO workshop training. Nevertheless, we have proposed a program which seeks to travel directly to diverse areas of conflict armed with background information and context studies, so as to bring together local leaders in dialogue. Though we hope to coordinate with all who are engaged in similar work, in this aspect we believe we are unique.

While it is too early to judge the success of our recent efforts at hosting training, we have witnessed some positive response. One of those involved in our NGO workshop has through his organization issued a further call for the media to cease provocation in issues which concern religion. Echoing the sentiments we discussed in both trainings, Saeed Abd el-Hafez Darwish has taken this message and spoken it into his own network

of activity.<sup>lxxii</sup> It is among the hopeful effects of message dissemination and capability building that multiplication of the idea occurs repeatedly outside of our own initiative. On a small scale we have already seen evidence of this.

Besides the vital work of providing training so as to change culture, these sessions would add the valuable service of building a network. Those who attend can be identified as people already possessing a vision of peace and community integration. Through maintaining ties with such people in every regional center contact points become established for when there is an outbreak of conflict. These people could be relied upon for information and advice on what to do next. Building this list of responsible people is an essential step of the 'before' stage of therapy, but given the time constraints involved does not preclude its immediate necessity moving into the 'during' stage.

### **During**

Once an incident of conflict is reported in the press the first step required is to find people in the category above, who have yet to be identified through previous interaction. If there are known figures then the work is easier. Immediate contact can be made with them to determine the best course of action, learning about details and seeking other contacts to represent all parties of the dispute. Effort can then be made to encourage all of these to be in dialogue together about the issue at hand, as each would represent at least a portion of those involved.

#### *Identification of Leaders*

In all likelihood, however, especially in these early stages, the conflict will have taken place in an unstudied area. If possible, the best course of events is to travel to the area directly, inquiring through general contacts in the government, security, or church about at least one person who would be considered a leader in the area. This person would then be requested to introduce us to others like him who could expand our conversation. With these people we would ask directly, what NGOs are at work here, and who are the recognized leaders who have the respect of all? Which priest is accepted by the Muslim community? Which Muslims have good relations with the church? Which local journalists have a reputation for objectivity? Which businessmen serve both communities and are threatened most by a divided cliental? The point of the visit is primarily to establish relationships, not to determine facts or to engage in investigations. While these can be done, and through these relationships the narrative will be pieced together, the focus will be kept on the future, not the past. Who are the people necessary and jointly acceptable who can lead the community through and then past this conflict?

If it is not possible to go directly, there is some possibility of the same scenario being done by telephone, or a non-affiliated person can be sent on our behalf. In any scenario the identification of responsible parties is of primary importance. It is only through local actors that local solutions can be found.

## *Context Study*

The other immediate activity to undertake following news of a conflict is an area context study. Dr. Jihad Auda of Helwan University has commented that journalists in Egypt, besides neglecting the historical context of a dispute, have little to no ability to study this issue, given the lack of a media database at the major newspaper headquarters.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Our center, however, possess exactly such a database. This valuable resource can be utilized to provide greater understanding of the wider nature of any conflict.

For example, once a dispute is reported in a certain area, all relevant data can be mined from the database to provide a context study, including an analysis of earlier tensions, issues and people involved, and how the issue was resolved, contained, neglected, or ignored. This report could then be distributed to the major newspapers for proper background reporting, but also to the area representatives, including government, religious, and civil society leaders. These reports will present data and testimony without bias to any side, allowing those involved to be reminded about root causes and original issues which may be forgotten or ignored upon escalation. These reports will be a tool which can equip wiser heads to prevail.

Once leaders are identified and context studies are completed, the stage for intervention can begin. As mentioned above, however, the timing of the intervention is set by the authorities. Even if access is granted quickly, it is most likely that the crisis moment in the conflict has passed, contained by the security apparatus. If local people whom we can support are allowed to participate it may help determine the course of any 'reconciliation' session to follow. Alternatively, if one is conducted along recent lines it will do little to soothe over the scars of the conflict. In many cases, therefore, the active intervention is not possible until the 'after' stage has begun, during which time the immediacy of the conflict has passed and responsible leaders may be better able to address real issues in dialogue with the opposing party. There is a continuum between the 'during' and 'after' stages, but the vital work is done 'after'.

## **After**

In the ideal scenario local leaders will have been at least partially identified through training exercises or other activities before conflict erupts. The more realistic scenario allows these people to be discovered immediately following report of a conflict. Once calm has settled, however, the work of rebuilding relationships through these important personalities begins in earnest. Rev. Safwat al-Baiadi, mentioned earlier as president of the Community Council of Protestant Churches of Egypt has commented that all peacemaking work requires great investment of personal time and effort.<sup>lxxiv</sup> This initiative is no longer in a 'project' phase of budgets, reporting, and deadlines. Instead, it requires patient and attentive listening, with suggestions offered

carefully and prudently. People in the midst of conflict can easily look at the other with rancor, having their eyes and minds tuned only to the interests of their own community. The building of peace and promotion of reconciliation requires a change of heart, and this can only be done through wise personal interaction, and can only be actuated through the free choice of the participants.

### *Field Visits to Collect Information and Promote Dialogue*

This represents the psychology of the 'after' phase, but there is practical work to be done as well. The conversations described above must take place over the course of several field visits to the area in question. They must also be conducted with all applicable parties. During these discussions the mediator must discover—through the eyes of each party—the conflicting needs and root issues behind the dispute. As his visits increase over time the discussion of these issues can be directed toward consideration also of the other party's perspective. In this manner the mediator can help pave the way for the most important step, resumption of dialogue.

This is the goal on which the mediator must concentrate from the beginning of his contact with area leaders. Wisdom will dictate when he introduces in the concept to the leaders he meets with individually, but with care and consideration he must work to open each party to the importance of sitting together with the adversarial other in order to discuss together the issues at hand. The previous work done in discovering needs and root causes is to give the mediator a context for the issue, as well as to help guide each party away from the exaggerated accusations which multiply easily during conflict. Yet ultimately the mediator does not have a stake or interest in arbitrating the claims. His goal is to prepare each party to discuss these claims themselves, helping each focus on the good of the community at large over the purported good of a particular interest. This will not be an easy task, and will require as much personal investment as offered previously in individual meetings. The encouragement to dialogue and the pressing for continuation represent the pinnacle of the mediator's contributions to the process of peace and rebuilding community.

### *Identifying a Mediator*

The identity of this mediator is an issue not yet addressed. It must be a person of joint respect from both parties of the dispute, and be of significant social esteem so as to command the time and attention of all – he cannot be one who is dismissed easily. Care must be taken, however, that he also be of personal integrity, free from his own personal interest in the matter. Local politicians, while potentially commanding respect, may also be seen as having an agenda for their own careers. This is possible of course for religious leaders, businessmen, and a variety of others. In our own efforts we must be conscious of this possibility. The work of reconciling a community following conflict, in which national or at least regional attention has been focused on the area, may attract much attention. While none of the positions described above should be

excluded as possibilities, the key factor in selecting a mediator should be his humility and care for the community with which he will engage.

Finding such persons will not be easy, especially in the beginning, but it is hoped that as we identify people through 'before' stage activities, and through them learn of other esteemed wise men of the area, that the network will come to include such VIP personalities who can of their own interest participate in mending the relationships broken after conflict. Over time, perhaps these same people could administer mediation repeatedly, earning a reputation of trust throughout the region. While much of the work as described above can be done without mediators, the crowning achievement of leading toward reconciliation belongs to them. The reward, however, must be received by the community.

### *Evaluating Izbet Bushra*

Our own project has seen partial realization of this vision in Izbet Bushra. Over the past half year we have visited the area, either ourselves or through our representatives, five distinct times. Our initial two visits were to the bishopric in which we inquired about the events and sought assistance on visiting the village itself. Though this was not possible at the time we did meet with Christian villagers who presented us with their version of the incident.<sup>lxxv</sup> Two visits to the village were conducted by our representatives which facilitated our knowledge of the Muslim perspective on events. Finally, we ourselves visited the village, and discovered the relative calm which has returned, but also the outstanding issues which remain over the disputed church which divided the community in the first place.<sup>lxxvi</sup>

It is not possible to gauge what effect our attention has had on the situation, but it can be understood that our sustained interest informed both parties of our monitoring. In our interactions with the church we made it clear that though we were concerned about the reported aggression against the Christians our activities were to be conducted with impartiality. We were interested ultimately in the reparation of community over the particularity of church building. Conversations with Muslim parties were fewer in number but carried the same message. We trust that our inquiries were heard by all, as such is the life in a small village.

We do not claim success in Izbet Bushra, however, for while the tensions have been lessened the two parties have only returned to a pre-conflict status quo, and do not appear to have reconciled. Our future involvement is still to be determined, but we are hopeful we may still encourage a true reconciliation in which both religious communities consciously through their leadership address the issues which divide, and which they face together.

### *Consideration of a Project to Promote Community Interaction*

One final possibility requires discussion in the 'after' stage of therapy, both in Izbet Bushra and in general. Supposing that dialogue is successful and that conflicting leaders of a community can reach a mutually agreeable settlement, what remains of the tensions which were felt by the population at large? Will they disappear simply due to the reconciliation of leaders? During these periods of conversation and dialogue it could be that workshops and seminars are offered to help the average person realize the importance of community integration, but having suffered aggression at the hands of the other, how likely are they to embrace these ideas?

Conversations with these area leaders will identify not only the issues which divide the community but also those under which the entire community suffers. The process of therapy must consider if sponsorship of a project could help alleviate some of these outstanding needs by increasing resources that can be shared by all. Special thought must be given to the type of project which will necessarily integrate the community. Design must be implemented so that formerly opposing parties must work together to realize project success.

Such a project will not only assist in the development of the area, but also achieve by-products of integrated relationships. It is more difficult for one to hold grudges against a neighbor with whom one is working side-by-side for the good of all. It is unlikely that community members will allow the reigniting of tensions when such would threaten the success of a new opportunity. It is hoped that a permanency of relations would continue long after the official dialogue has concluded, and a well designed project may contribute to this goal. Sources for financial backing of these projects will be an issue to consider during each individual episode.

## **Conclusion**

The above information, contained in the division of diagnosis, prognosis, and therapy, represents a presentation of all experiences gained through the study of and involvement in Egyptian conflict situations. At the same time, it is understood that this paper is more a foundation for future work, rather than a description of a solution. The experiences described in diagnosis and prognosis are fuller than those of therapy. We have been more able to identify the problems than to verify solutions.

The next phase of our project is to identify the communities in need of reconciliation and actively seek to apply the ideas contained within this paper. This involves establishing a network of trusted possible mediators, building an early warning system, and traveling to multiple locations of conflict so as to identify and encourage local leaders in social reconciliation. For all of these goals we will work in accordance with all Egyptian laws and in consideration of cultural realities. As such, we wish to remain in cooperation with all who have a stake in this issue, for peace and stability in the diverse communities of Egypt is desired by all.

This project is also conducted in association with many trusted Egyptian advisors who know the realities of life and best areas for concentration of activity. Their advice



has already informed most of the content of this paper, and they are thanked for their continued contributions.

### **Recommendations from the Project**

From the findings presented in the paper we offer the following recommendations for the different groups potentially involved in areas of conflict. These recommendations are in the process of being submitted to the board of directors for the Center for Arab West Understanding, to be presented as the official statement of our organization.

*For the Egyptian government:*

- Pass a unified law for the building of houses of worship
- Implement and enforce land registration reforms throughout Egypt
- Standardize reconciliation committee procedure to increase transparency, by:
  - Legal reform to stipulate scope of reconciliation committee activity and non-negotiable criminal offenses
  - Prior agreement between parties about issues to be decided by the committee
  - Final agreement requires written stipulations and approval of all parties, which is then registered with the appropriate authorities to become legally binding

*For religious institutions:*

- Christians institutions should form a standing committee, both clerical and lay, with Muslim participation to study rapid response action steps following outbreak of violent conflict, to consider:
  - Best practices for good community relations
  - Necessary training for priests in how to interact with their surroundings -- Christian, Muslim, government, media, etc.
  - Self-evaluation of Christian conduct leading up the conflict, suggesting remedies for any faults
  - Identification of key relationships to support/foster/restore in the area of tension
- Muslim institutions should dispatch delegations with Christian participation to areas suffering violent conflict so as to lead in correct understanding of the religion, implementing a system of sustained teaching and monitoring

*For local leaders:*

- Form community councils for monthly consideration of local affairs, composed of representatives from all major interest groups – political, religious, business, tribal, NGO, etc
  - Initiative variable, but centered in the mayor who marshals community involvement

- Agenda set by each representative discussing the concerns of their grouping, with the mayor summarizing this into specific shared issues
- Duplication of this informal but regular meeting pattern is necessary throughout Egypt, requiring government cooperation and likely NGO sponsorship

*For NGO leaders:*

- Maintain communication with other leaders from the local NGO community through monthly area meetings to:
  - Discuss community-wide affairs
  - Decide jointly who best can invest personal work outside of their project to leverage their cooperative relationships to prevent escalation of ordinary conflicts
  - Initiate contact with local press representatives so as to issue a joint press release about root causes and local context of incidents of conflict, but also to generally inform the public about area needs

*For the media:*

- Establish a media critique system with Egyptian media representatives to publish violations of Egyptian media ethics on the internet
- Strengthen the capacity and coverage of Upper Egyptian and Delta regional reporting by establishing regional press resource centers through NGO cooperation
- Build or gain access to a media database to quickly and easily identify history and context of a particular conflict

*For foreign funding agencies:*

- Join in Stage 2 of the ZIVIC peace building program, to build local dialogue groups to prevent escalation of conflicts and to engage in reconciliation once a problem occurs
- Fund efforts at conflict resolution, peace, and reconciliation training through religious institutions and NGOs so as to reach the local populations throughout Egypt
- Fund projects which ensure broad intergroup participation, such as community centers, school support, and microenterprise Fund journalistic capacity building, especially in Upper Egypt, through training workshops, regional media resource centers, and a database to access all historical, cultural, and relational background information related to the news item
- Share stores of success in similar initiatives from around the world

## **Endnotes:**

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<sup>i</sup> Galtung, Johan. 50 Years, 100 Peace and Conflict Perspectives. Transcend University Press, 2008.

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ii [www.arabwestreport.info](http://www.arabwestreport.info)

iii AWR 2009, week 27, article 23

iv Arab West Papers 2009, 21

v Murray, John. "The Cairo Stories: Some Reflections on Conflict Resolution in Egypt." *Negotiation Journal*. January 1997, p.39-60.

vi Arab West Papers 2008, 4

vii From personal conversation between a senior Egyptian European diplomat and Cornelis Hulsman.

viii AWR 2009, week 45, article 3

ix AWR editor-in-chief Cornelis Hulsman remembers encounters with Christian leaders who did not automatically blame security. A prominent example was Bishop Athanasius (RNSAW 2000, week 46, art. 5 and RNSAW 2000, week 48, art. 14). This does not mean that Bishop Athanasius never critiqued security. He did so in the case of the conversion of Therese Shaker to Islam in 1997 because she was a minor. He, however, refrained from going public with his critique. The result was that she returned and stayed for a while with nuns because of her justified fear of her family. Therese later chose to return home, but was murdered by her eldest brother because she continued to consider escaping from her family through conversion to Islam. Hulsman was in close association with Bishop Athanasius as he dealt with this tragic situation. Bishop Athanasius' opinions about the state and thus also security were not very different from those of Father Matta al-Meskeen (RNSAW, 2001, week 51, art. 13). More of Father Matta's views can be read in his book, "Church and State". Another Christian who refused to blame security outright is Father Yu'annis from Maghagha (AWR, 2009, week 2, art 2, Week 47, art. 4). Bishop Athanasius, Father Matta and Father Yu'annis were all influenced by the Sunday school of Giza which sought actively dialogue with Muslims (RNSAW 2002, week 46, art. 2).

x Arab West Papers, 2009, 18.

xi Pope Shenouda has led the Coptic Orthodox Church since 1971, championing the Sunday school movement which has led this revival. See an article by Cornelis Hulsman in *Christianity Today*, RNSAW 2001, week 51, article 13.

xii Cornelis Hulsman relates that many Copts abroad are influenced by two situations which do not exist yet become imposed on the Egyptian religious situation. First, these Copts remember from their days in Egypt the polarized and violent conditions of the 1970s and 1980s, but this is very different from the Egypt of today. Second, due to their current residence in the West they think in terms of Western democracy, but this is not helpful for determining the best course of events to help the Copts of Egypt. Beyond these false paradigms is the reliance on local Egyptian partisan sources which fail to convey the wider context of individual incidents. As such, there is seen a strong anti-government and anti-Islamic feature to their critique. Expatriate Copts are politically active and work to engage the media, and find success with others who share the anti-Islamic critique, but generally are not successful in influencing secular media, which

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overlooks most incidents except when larger aggressions such as Nag Hamadi take place. Though most of these Copts would agree that anti-Islamic polemic is not the most helpful remedy for the problems of Egyptian Christians, following such atrocities many do not know what else to do, being dependant on local partisan sources as previously described. Unfortunately, these opinions then return to Egypt to inform local Coptic thought, deepening the feeling of persecution. This is a cycle which needs to be broken.

<sup>xiii</sup> Arab West Papers, 2009, 18.

<sup>xiv</sup> From a conversation with Ibrahim Saleh, Chair of the Journalism Research and Education Section, IAMCR, on September 23, 2009.

<sup>xv</sup> AWR 2009, week 40, article 2.

<sup>xvi</sup> From a conversation with Ibrahim Saleh, Chair of the Journalism Research and Education Section, IAMCR, on September 23, 2009.

<sup>xvii</sup> [http://www.arabwestreport.info/page\\_details.php?d\\_id=25&pname=Media%20we%20cover](http://www.arabwestreport.info/page_details.php?d_id=25&pname=Media%20we%20cover)

<sup>xviii</sup> AWR 2009, week 40, article 2.

<sup>xix</sup> AWR 2010, week 2, article 11.

<sup>xx</sup> AWR 2009, week 50, article 2.

<sup>xxi</sup> AWR 2009, week 50, article 2.

<sup>xxii</sup> AWR 2010, week 2, article 9.

<sup>xxiii</sup> AWR 2010, week 2, article 10.

<sup>xxiv</sup> For examples of land registration, see Arab West Papers 2009, 15; for examples of church building see Arab West Papers 2008, 4.

<sup>xxv</sup> Arab West Papers 2010, 22.

<sup>xxvi</sup> AWR 2009, week 27, article 23.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Arab West Papers 2010, 21.

<sup>xxviii</sup> AWR 2009, week 2, article 2.

<sup>xxix</sup> AWR 2009, week 32, article 2.

<sup>xxx</sup> Arab West Papers 2010, 22.

<sup>xxxi</sup> From a conversation with Naguib Gabraeel, December 2, 2009.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Shukry, Nader. Traditional Reconciliation Sessions. Cairo: Watani Publications, 2009.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> AWR 2009, week 45, article 28.

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xxxiv Arab West Papers 2010, 25.

xxxv AWR 2009, week 49, article 2.

xxxvi AWR 2009, week 44, article 18.

xxxvii AWR 2010, week 1, article 2.

xxxviii Arab West Papers 2010, 23.

xxxix See for example the trials after al-Kushh, RNSAW 2001, week 8, article 9.

xl Arab West Papers 2010, 25.

xli AWR 2010, week 1, article 2.

xlii AWR 2009, week 45, article 4.

xliii Arab West Papers 2010, 25.

xliv AWR 2010, week 2, article 8.

xlv Arab West Papers 2010, 21.

xlvi Thistlethwaite, Susan and Glen Stassen. "Abrahamic Alternatives to War: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives on Just Peacemaking." Special Report, October 2008, US Institute of Peace. <http://www.usip.org/resources/abrahamic-alternatives-war-jewish-christian-and-muslim-perspectives-just-peacemaking>

xlvii Certificate Course in Interfaith Conflict Resolution. US Institute of Peace. July 7, 2008. [www.usip.org/training/online](http://www.usip.org/training/online)

xlviii [http://www.uri.org/Peacebuilding\\_Guide.html](http://www.uri.org/Peacebuilding_Guide.html)

xlix Arab West Papers 2010, 24.

<sup>1</sup> Cornelis Hulsman moderates Ebeid's view by highlighting the various perspectives people maintain toward religion. While liberal Muslims and Christians may be able to cooperate along religious lines, he agrees that this would be very difficult in Egypt.

<sup>2</sup> From a telephone conversation on November 21, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> AWR 2010, week 2, article 11.

<sup>4</sup> AWR 2010, week 2, article 12.

<sup>5</sup> From a conversation with Ibrahim Saleh, Chair of the Journalism Research and Education Section, IAMCR, on September 23, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> AWR 2009, week 48, article 2.

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- lvi Arab West Papers 2010, 15 – review by Dr. Baha Bakry.
- lvii AWR 2010, week 2, article 12.
- lviii Murray, John. "The Cairo Stories: Some Reflections on Conflict Resolution in Egypt." Negotiation Journal. January 1997, p.39-60.
- lix AWR 2009, week 22, article 2.
- lx <http://www.berghof-conflictresearch.org/en/>
- lxi <http://www.globalpeacebuilders.org/>
- lxii <http://www.gppac.net>
- lxiii [http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=18709&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=18709&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)
- lxiv <http://www.rccp-jid.org/>
- lxv <http://www.peacebuilderscommunity.org/>
- lxvi From a conversation with Fr. Abd al-Masih, July 21, 2009.
- lxvii RNSAW 2000, week 46, article 5.
- lxviii AWR 2010, week 2, article 20.
- lxix AWR 2010, week 2, article 21.
- lxx In a telephone conversation February 20, 2010, Dr. Hassan Wagieh iterated that such measures were better done without distinction to religion. He has had interactions with many groups, training in communication skills, and found that results are mixed among classes, including religious. Yet when there is any involvement of foreigners in internal Egyptian affairs, the matter becomes very sensitive. Civil society is a better field on which to operate.
- lxxi AWR 2009, week 45, article 4.
- lxxii Moltaka Press Release, January 11, 2010. <http://moltaka.org/issues/10/pr0111.html> (Arabic site)
- lxxiii AWR 2010, week 2, article 11.
- lxxiv AWR 2009, week 45, article 4.
- lxxv AWR 2009, week 45, article 3.
- lxxvi AWR 2010, week 2, article 8.