

The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights

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¹Al Rawda Massacre

Wilayat Sina'a attempts genocide

An Analytical report by The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights

8/10 Mathaf El Manial St, Manial El Roda , Cairo, Egypt

Tel: (02) 363 6811 / (02) 362 0467

Fax: (02) 362 1613

eohr@link.net E-mail :

<http://www.eohr.org>

¹ Author: Mohamed Osman (IR Coordinator of the EOHR)

Sinai Mosque attack

Militant group attempts genocide

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Overview

The Northern half of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula has been embroiled in a bloody insurgency since the uprising January 2011 that toppled long time autocrat Hosni Mubarak and the turmoil that followed. The insurgency intensified in Mid 2013 after the unceremonious end of the Muslim Brotherhood's brief and disastrous tenure in office. In order to put things into more perspective, Northern Sinai has a rocky history and has always had a complicated relationship with the central government since Israel's total withdrawal from the Peninsula in 1989. Northern Sinai a spacious sparsely populated, underdeveloped area, largely inhabited by Bedouin tribes. The lack of development in the region left many residents of the area to resort to illicit criminal activities to make a living that included trafficking in arms, drugs and even human beings. In the early 2000s with the rise of Jihadist influences in the Gaza strip and the defeat of Jihadist militant groups in Upper Egypt, Sinai started turning into a favoured destination for Jihadist sympathizers and militants. In 2004 Jihadist militants announced their presence when a truck bomb annihilated Taba's luxurious Hilton resort which happens to be popular with Israeli tourists in particular. 2005 and 2006 witnessed similar deadly attacks in Sharm Al Sheikh and Dahab. All of these attacks were claimed by groups affiliated in some capacity with Al Qaeda. Security sources suggested that those groups were composed largely of Sinai Bedouins, Palestinians and Egyptians from the mainland as well. These attacks were followed by massive crackdowns that amounted to collective punishment in some cases which strengthened the feelings of resentment among

many circles in the Sinai. After the uprising of 2011 law and order collapsed in Northern Sinai, and the absence of significant military presence in the Peninsula (due to the limitations stipulated by the peace treaty with Israel) caused a terminal deterioration of the situation. Militant attacks by a group that emerged under the name Ansar Bayt Al Maqdis (champions of Jerusalem), at first were almost exclusive to sabotaging Gas pipelines between Egypt and Israel. However shortly after, Militants began to target security forces. In response the Armed Forces were deployed to the area however no serious effort was made to confront the insurgency due to the political turmoil sweeping the country back then, especially that the interim government was headed by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). In June 2012 SCAF handed power to the President elect Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood. A couple of months later insurgents massacred 16 soldiers in what came to be known as the Rafah Massacre. In response the military launched an offensive to uproot the insurgents, however the operation was suspended by Morsi's government and SCAF leaders were sacked. Throughout Morsi's reign in power the Sinai witnessed a lull without any major attacks, and even when 7 soldiers were abducted by militants they were released after a negotiated settlement with Mr. Morsi's government who explicitly stated that he is keen to preserve the lives of the kidnappers and the abducted. When Morsi's was ousted in July 2013, militants launched a massive campaign against security forces in the Sinai. Later militants would target civilians, tourists, judges, government officials and religious minorities in the Sinai, and some attacks even reached Cairo, Alexandria, the Delta and Upper Egypt. Ansar Bayt Al Maqdis in 2014 pledged allegiance to The Islamic State (ISIS) and renamed themselves to become Wilayet Sina'a (Sinai Province), which tied the conflict in the Sinai to the developments in the region directly complicating the situation even further. In this paper EOHR looks at the Mosque attacks of November 24th that amounted to a full-scale massacre of unprecedented proportions in Egypt's modern history. The paper links the massacre to earlier instances where the militant group engaged in sectarian violence and targeted religious minorities in Egypt. The paper argues that judging by the intentions, ideological motives and methods of execution, Wilayet Sina'a is attempting nothing less than genocide which underlines the danger terrorism poses to Egypt's unity and stability as well as the grave threat it presents to human rights in Egypt.

Definition of Genocide

Even though the term genocide was a product of the 20th century, the crime itself is much older in every aspect. However, the term has some requirements in order for it to be applied correctly and not get confused with other types of mass killings. The definition of genocide is far from controversial and has been dictated by international law in the mid 20th century. This process of definition and criminalization of the act was launched by a nascent United Nations in the aftermath of World War II and the horrors of the holocaust. The UN General Assembly in 1948 adopted resolution 260, which in turn became the **Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide**. The convention entered into force in 1951, and as of now 143 states are party to it. The convention along with other human right treaties and conventions render the criminalization of Genocide as an undisputedly universal notion. With its criminalization established, the convention also gave a clear definition to what constitutes Genocide.

Article (2) of the convention says that Genocide is any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The convention also does not limit the criminalization to the successful execution of Genocide it also criminalizes any attempts to carry this act in article (3) that says the following acts shall be punishable:

- (a) Genocide;
- (b) Conspiracy to commit genocide;

- (c) Direct and public incitement to commit genocide;
- (d) Attempt to commit genocide;
- (e) Complicity in genocide

With the definition of what constitutes genocide and by identifying who are to be held responsible if the act was executed or attempted, the convention gives us a sufficient space to legally hold those responsible for genocide accountable whether it's in a local setting or in an international one.

Nature of IS attacks and their intent

The Islamic State militant group with all of its branches and affiliates worldwide follow an extremely radical interpretation of Islam largely influenced by Salafi/Wahabi religious concepts and theology as well as Islamist political thought especially that of Sayed Qutb and Abu A'laa Al Mawdudi. IS seeks to establish an Islamic Caliphate through overthrowing state institutions and seizing territory in Muslim majority countries and areas. They reject the nation state, rule of law, human rights and democracy as they are all considered alien concepts imposed on Muslim societies. The alternative they propose is what they perceive as an Islamic utopia while in reality it's nothing more than an attempted ugly and deformed rebirth of a medieval empire. All areas that IS and its affiliates are active in have witnessed horrendous violations of human rights. Among those violations that have been documented, was a crime that trumps any other crime in its scale, methods and effects; Genocide. IS has committed a full-fledged genocide against minorities in Syria and Iraq that targeted Yazidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims. These ranged from extermination of village populations, to forced displacements, slavery, and forced conversions. As a result, entire areas were depopulated, thousands were killed and thousands more were taken captive and forced into slavery. These acts attempted to annihilate certain ethnic and religious groups that did not fit within the IS conception of the Islamic society they wish to create. This establishes the fact that committing genocide is part of the group's plan in order to establish what they proclaim as a Muslim Caliphate.

In Egypt's Sinai Peninsula Ansar Bayt Al Maqdis the largest and most powerful militant group pledged allegiance to IS in November 2014, and renamed itself to become Wilayet Sina'a (Sinai Province). The group seeks to establish itself as the defacto government of Sinai, with the intent of bringing it under the control and power of the IS franchise. However, in Egypt unlike Iraq and Syria, the population is largely homogenous, there isn't an active armed conflict challenging state control and the government has monopoly over the use of force in the Weberian sense. Therefore despite the group's targeting of security forces and the military constantly it has failed to seize any territory or town in the restive area, and it also has been on the receiving end of a stiff crackdown by the police and military that killed hundreds among their ranks at the lowest estimate. IS has also lost most of its territory in Iraq and Syria thanks to decisive military action by a variety of forces that included the US, Russia, Iran, the Iraqi government, the Syrian government, Kurdish forces, Shiite Militias, Syrian Rebels and the long list goes on. The crushing of IS's pseudo state in those areas necessitate that they find other regions and hotspot to move their main operations too, and Sinai in the opinion of many analysts might be the next hotbed of IS in the coming months.

IS attempts genocide

The militants in order to maximize their pressure on the Egyptian government and to validate their extremist credentials have resorted to targeting civilians more often than before, a trend that keeps growing at a very alarming pace. Foreign tourists were targeted to sabotage Egypt's economy and most notorious of such incidents was the downing of the Russian Airliner near Sharm Al Sheikh on October 2015. The group then escalated against religious minority groups which brings us to the main focus of this paper which is attempted genocide. Wilayet Sina'a has pledged to cleanse Egypt from Christians. The group carried out several bombings and shootings against Churches and Christian worshippers. Most notably the attacks that targeted Al Abbasiya Cathedral in December 2016, as well as Church bombings in the cities of Tanta and Alexandria in April 2017 and the latest was the massacring of worshipers on a bus near a monastery in Minya province in Upper Egypt. Those attacks combined caused the deaths of over 130 Christian civilians. However, what was even more alarming were the threats Christian inhabitants of Northern Sinai received to leave the area. The group distributed fliers instructing Christians to leave and warning them of the

consequences if they stayed. The group indeed demonstrated its seriousness with a series of killing and kidnappings that terrorized Christian families living on the Northern Sinai and indeed most of them left the area over the past few months. If this is not ethnic cleansing then one does not know what is.

Then heads were turned to the Sufis. Sufism has a long tradition in Egypt. Followers of Sufi Tariqas are estimated to be between 4 million and 18 million Egyptians which makes them a sizable religious group in Egyptian society especially that mainstream Islam in Egypt is heavily influenced by Sufism in many circles. IS in general and Wilayet Sina'a in particular have a strong dogmatic aversion to Sufism. They view it as a heretical sect of Islam that encourages polytheism and corrupts true faith. They especially disdain Sufi veneration of shrines and saints and they also dismiss Sufi mysticism as heretical innovations. Since 2011 Militants in Sinai, and even other Salafi groups elsewhere in the country attacked and burned down several shrines instigating a state of tension between Sufis and ultra conservative Muslim segments in general. Wilayet Sina'a threatened Sufi Muslims more than once, and warned them to cease their practices and return to true Islam. The group in November 2016 kidnapped Sheikh Suleiman Abu Haraz a 98 year old Sufi cleric and beheaded him in a gruesome video that left many stunned at the level of brutality and cruelty.

Al Rawda Mosque which was the sight of the last massacre was subjected to threats by the Wilayet Sina'a and were warned to cease any Sufi rituals a few weeks prior to the attacks. The warnings by the group were ignored, and then came the massacre of November 24th 2017. Militants targeted the Mosque with explosives and automatic weapons during Friday prayers. The militants according to eye witnesses carried IS flags, blocked the roads to prevent ambulances and security forces from reaching the mosque, and even there were reports that some of the fleeing victims were followed and gunned down in their homes. The Massacre left 309 people dead out a village population of 2400. No official claim of responsibility has been issued as of yet, however prior IS threats, along with the group's overt intentions to eradicate religious minorities and eye witness accounts confirm the group's implication in this vile massacre. The group carried out an act that attempted to exterminate the followers of the Garrariya Sufi order (To which the mosque, its regular worshipers and the village inhabitants belong to). This came after one of the group's commanders stated that they intend to eradicate Sufism in its three strongholds in Sinai and he mentioned the village of Al Rawda by name. This statement was made last January according the IS's official English language magazine Rumiya. The group harbours the intentions to destroy Sufism.

This can only be achieved through extermination, displacement and forced conversions. The group seems to be working on achieving just that to prove its power and capabilities and challenge the Egyptian government's power and legitimacy. What happened at Al Rawda when taken within the context of the prelude to the events, previous attacks and the group's overt intentions and conviction we can easily apply articles 2 and 3 of the **Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide** in order to define this crime with the right terms and prosecute its culprits as perpetrators of attempted genocide and not just another terrorist attack.

Recommendations

The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights views these developments in the Sinai with great concern, and believes that extremist militants are bent on carrying out massive acts of violence against religious minorities in order to forcefully assimilate them into their culture under the threat of total annihilation. EOHR stresses the importance of appreciating the gravity of the situation by the Government of Egypt and the International Community, as those terrorist groups enhance and develop their capabilities to inflict the maximum amount of damage on Egypt's state and society. Therefore EOHR came up with a number of recommendations that are essential in order to avert the dangers of terrorism and attempted genocide in Northern Sinai.

Recommendations:

- EOHR urges the government of Egypt to take the necessary security measures to safeguard the lives of its citizens in accordance with the principles of human rights
- EOHR stresses the importance of a serious judicial investigation of Al Rawda massacre so that the perpetrators can be held accountable
- EOHR demands that the government of Egypt spare no effort to apprehend the culprits who committed Al Rawda Mosque massacre so that they can answer for their crime in court

- EOHR implores Egypt's government to uphold international human rights law and international humanitarian law while carrying out any counterterrorism operations in the Sinai and elsewhere, and to avoid the use of indiscriminate force against civilians.
- EOHR suggests the creation of a joint fact-finding mission to investigate the possibility of attempted genocide at Al Rawda that includes representatives from the executive branches of the Egyptian government, the National Council for Human Rights, the office of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, African Commission on Human and People's Rights, Egyptian Human Rights groups and international human rights organizations
- EOHR calls upon the international community to severely sanction states sponsoring terrorism
- EOHR demands that Egypt's house of representatives draft a law that incriminates hate speech and all forms of discrimination in accordance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- EOHR reaffirms Egypt's government's responsibility to uphold every citizen's rights to life, freedom of faith, freedom of expression and security in accordance with Egypt's Constitution, the Universal Declaration for Human Rights, and the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.