

## EGYPTE :

### Les repercussions of the Nag Hammadi massacre

#### Facts:

- On 8 January, the Interior Ministry announced the arrest of three suspects of the shoot-out that occurred on 6 January in Nag Hammadi (governorate of Qena, Upper Egypt) which led to the death of six Copts and the Muslim guard of the attacked church.
- According to the government-owned media, the assailants surrendered to the police after they were surrounded by the security forces. The three suspects who are said to have serious criminal records finally admitted to the allegations after having denied them first.
- The Nag Hammadi massacre was followed by numerous violent intercommunity clashes in Nag Hammadi, Rahmaniya and Baghoura villages situated in the Qena governorate. These clashes saw the shops and houses of the Copt minority being set on fire.
- 42 “troublemakers” of which 28 are Copts and 14 are Muslims have been arrested.

#### Comments:

- 1/ The announcement regarding the arrest of the suspected assailants comes with some contradictory details:
- The authorities rushed to announce that the three suspects surrendered of their own free will and that they also admitted to the crime right away,
  - According to a reliable source from Qena, the suspects surrendered only after a local high-ranking police officer persuaded them to do so,
  - The next day, the Arab media revealed that the main suspect, arrested at the site of the incident soon after the shoot-out had denied being involved in it.

Besides, it is highly likely that the suspects are not the real perpetrators of the massacre, their profile being more like the “village thugs” than an organised armed group.

2/ Moreover, Anba Kirilious, the village’s bishop, says that the head of the gang could have been paid to commit this crime arguing that he “*was not a believer*” – thus ruling out the “religious” angle, but also adds that he “*was offering his services to others*”, suggesting that the real brain behind the attack has not yet been arrested. According to Kirilious, the “village thugs” were actually too poor to have been able afford automatic weapons.

Their charges thus seem to be uniquely intended to appease the intercommunity conflicts. More than anything this seems to be an attempt by the authorities to fend off accusations of “failure to provide assistance” levelled regularly by the Copt minority, which does not get any special protection in spite of repeated demands.

3/ The official version is refuted by the representatives of the Copt community.

They have responded by announcing the formation of a committee to monitor the investigation, comprising advocates belonging to both Copt and Muslim communities. They particularly fear the exclusion of Copt witnesses who were present at the site of the event.

#### Outlook:

- **The intercommunity unrest might exacerbate in Upper Egypt during the judicial investigations, or even spread to other regions inhabited by the Copt minority, that is Alexandria and Cairo.**