



Was Christian Student in Egypt Killed for Wearing a Cross?

What will the Arab Spring mean to Christians in the Arab world? Persecution of Christians in Muslim countries has been well documented; however, ominous signals are emerging of escalating violence against them — even in schools. Egyptian media reported that as a result of a fight over a classroom seat in a school in Malawi, Egypt, on October 16, a Christian student was killed.



The news source Copts Without Borders, which covers stories affecting Coptic Christians around the world, described the killing very differently, reporting that the student was murdered because he was a Coptic Christian wearing a crucifix. Activist Mark Ebeid acknowledged that this conclusion was reached reluctantly: “We wanted to believe the official version because the Coptic version was a catastrophe as it would take the persecution of Christians also to the schools.”

Parents of [Ayman Nabil Labid](#), the slain Christian student, have broken their silence and confirmed that their son was killed “in cold blood because he refused to take off his crucifix as ordered by his Muslim teacher.” Ayman’s father, Nabil Labid, noted that the boy also had a cross tattooed on his wrist, in keeping with Coptic traditions, as well as another cross which he wore under his clothing.

Ayman’s classmates, who were at the hospital where Ayman was taken and at his funeral, told his parents what they had seen in the room when the attack occurred. They recounted that Ayman was told to cover his wrist tattoo. His mother continued: “The teacher nearly choked my son and some Muslim students joined in the beating.”

Ayman’s father said that these eyewitnesses contradicted the official story that Ayman was beaten up in the school yard, farther away from school authorities. He related their evidence: “They beat my son so much in the classroom that he fled to the lavatory on the ground floor, but they followed him and continued their assault. When one of the supervisors took him to his room, Ayman was still breathing. The ambulance transported him from there dead, one hour later.”

Ayman’s father also contended that everyone knew what really happened, but parents would not speak up:

They are afraid of the school administration, which has lots of ways to harass the students, as well as being afraid of the families of the two Muslim killers. I insist that the Arabic teacher, the



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on November 2, 2011

headmaster, and the supervisors should be charged as well as the two students who committed the crime: the Arabic language teacher who incited the students to attack my son, the headmaster who would not go to the classroom to see what [was] going on there when alerted to the beatings, but rather said [he wanted] to be left alone and continued sipping his tea, and the supervisors who failed in their supervising duties.

The prosecution has three witnesses — two men working at the school who named the assailants, and one student who later wanted to retract his statement but was refused. Ayman’s father, however, questions how the investigation is being conducted: “The evidence is under lock and key. Everyone is hiding the evidence. We will know the truth after forensic medicine has finished the report next week.” He charged that the head of the detectives was attempting to present the case as one of simply normal student friction rather than official persecution of Christians.

According to [jihadwatch.org](#), two Muslim students, Mostapha Essam and Walid Mostafa Sayed, were arrested and detained pending investigations in the murder case.

Thousands of Coptic Christians marched in the streets of Malawi, describing Ayman as a “martyr of the cross.” Governor El-Rouby of Malawi’s Minya province visited the Coptic bishop to extend his sympathies. He also suspended the headmaster and two supervisors at the school.

Farida El-Shobashy wrote in her column in the newspaper *Masry Youm*:

I was shaken to the bones when I read the news that a teacher forced a student to take off the crucifix he wore, and when the Christian student stood firm for his rights, the teacher quarreled with him, joined by some of the students; he was beastly assaulted until his last breath left him.

The ancient community of [Coptic Christians](#) comprises about 10 percent of the country’s population — perhaps as many as eight million. In Sudan — with historically strong ties to Egypt — there are an estimated half-million Copts. Throughout the Middle East and western Asia, the so-called democratization of Arab and Islamic lands has led to perilous times for Christians in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, and elsewhere.

The Copts in Egypt have weathered political storms for millennia and survived. But observers wonder if they will be able to withstand democracy in a nation of Muslims.

Photo: Mourners carry the coffins of victims of clashes between protesters and security forces in Cairo, Egypt, Oct. 10, 2011: AP Images



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