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EGYPT | Enforced Reconciliation Meeting Bars Copt from Church, Land

Hamdy Makanoty, a Copt from Alexandria, was prohibited from visiting his land and his local church in the village of Ola in Amereya, following an enforced reconciliation meeting to settle a land dispute with a Bedouin tribe.

In addition to being prevented from visiting his land, Makanoty was prohibited from raising the matter for four months. He and his family were banned from attending their local church for the same four-month period. The reconciliation meeting also ruled that members of the Heweita Bedouin tribe were prohibited from visiting the plot of land for the same four-month period.

Maspero Youth Union in Alexandria reported that Makanoty was made to submit to the reconciliation meeting after an attempt by police to return his land to him on Sept. 20 descended into violent clashes, with police resorting to tear gas and rubber bullets. During the violence, a local man named Mahmoud Eissa was killed. After the police withdrew, members of the Heweita tribe returned, along with others from surrounding villages, blamed Makanoty for the death and attacked his house and those of his relatives. The family fled the village after receiving threats of forced eviction.

Makanoty purchased the plot of land in 1995. After it was seized extra judicially by members of the Heweita tribe in 2012, Makanoty filed and won a court case requiring the land to be returned. When the land was not returned voluntarily, police attempted to enforce the verdict, only to withdraw after violent clashes with the group.

These latest clashes were the second attempt at enforcing the court verdict. The incident has fueled on-going sectarian tensions, which in the absence of police or state security have been left to continue. A village priest told local media that he had requested police presence and protection in the area, especially for the Coptic community, but to no avail. Reportedly, members of another Bedouin tribe, the Al Maghawra, have offered to protect the homes of the Coptic families targeted in the attacks.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive at Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "Our thoughts and prayers are with the family of Mr. Eissa, who tragically lost his life in these violent clashes. We urge all sides to halt the violence and reduce tensions in order to prevent further loss of life. Mr. Makanoty's case illustrates once again that enforced reconciliation meetings do not deliver justice; rather, they impose ad-hoc, unjust and often un-constitutional conditions on the victims of sectarian violence. It is unacceptable that despite having won his case in a court of law, Mr. Makanoty is now barred from his land and his church, a violation of his right to freedom of religion or belief. CSW urges an end to the use of these reconciliation meetings to settle

sectarian tensions as they perpetuate impunity for perpetrators of sectarian violence, who generally face no consequences for their crimes. We also call for police protection for those being targeted in Amereya and for the perpetrators of the violence and those responsible for the death of Mr. Eissa to be brought to justice.”