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ISIS video purports to show killing of Ethiopian Christians in Libya

Huffington Post (19.04.2015) <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/19/isis-ethiopians- n 7094876.html> - Islamic State militants in Libya shot and beheaded groups of captive Ethiopian Christians, a video purportedly from the extremists showed Sunday. The attack widens the circle of nations affected by the group's atrocities while showing its growth beyond a self-declared caliphate in Syria and Iraq.

The release of the 29-minute video comes a day after Afghanistan's president blamed the extremists for a suicide attack in his country that killed at least 35 people — and underscores the chaos gripping Libya after its 2011 civil war and the killing of dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

It also mirrored a film released in February showing militants beheading 21 captured Egyptian Christians on a Libyan beach, which immediately drew Egyptian airstrikes on the group's suspected positions in Libya. Whether Ethiopia would — or could — respond with similar military force remains unclear.

Ethiopia long has drawn the anger of Islamic extremists over its military's attacks on neighboring Somalia, whose population is almost entirely Muslim. While the militant in the video at one point said "Muslim blood that was shed under the hands of your religion is not cheap," it did not specifically mention the Ethiopian government's actions.

The video, released via militant social media accounts and websites, could not be independently verified by The Associated Press. However, it corresponded to other videos released by the Islamic State group and bore the symbol of its al-Furqan media arm.

The video starts with what it called a history of Christian-Muslim relations, followed by scenes of militants destroying churches, graves and icons. A masked fighter brandishing a pistol delivers a long statement, saying Christians must convert to Islam or pay a special tax prescribed by the Quran.

It shows one group of captives, identified as Ethiopian Christians, purportedly held by an Islamic State affiliate in eastern Libya known as Barqa Province. It also shows another purportedly held by an affiliate in the southern Libyan calling itself the Fazzan Province. The video then switches between footage of the captives in the south being shot dead and the captives in the east being beheaded on a beach. It was not immediately possible to estimate how many captives were killed or confirm their identities.

In Ethiopia, government spokesman Redwan Hussein said officials were in contact with its embassy in Cairo to verify the video's authenticity. Hussein said he believed those killed likely were Ethiopian migrants hoping to reach Europe. Libya has become a hub for migrants across Africa hoping to cross the Mediterranean to enter Europe for work and better lives.

"If this is confirmed, it will be a warning to people who wish to risk and travel to Europe though the dangerous route," Hussein said.

Abba Kaletsidk Mulugeta, an official with the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church's Patriarchate Office, told the AP he also believed the victims likely were migrants.

"I believe this is just another case of the IS group killing Christians in the name of Islam. Our fellow citizens have just been killed on a faith-based violence that is totally unacceptable. This is outrageous," Mulugeta said. "No religion orders the killing of other people, even people from another religion."

Ethiopia's options to retaliate remain slim, given its distance from Libya. However, Egyptian Ambassador to Ethiopia Mohammed Edrees said his country could partner with Addis Ababa to strike the militants.

"That could be an option," Edrees told the AP. "We will see and explore what is possible to deal with group."

Edrees said Ethiopian officials had yet to approach Egypt to discuss the idea.

After the February killings of the Coptic Christians, Egypt's military responded with airstrikes targeting the militant stronghold of Darna. It has not launched further strikes, though its president is trying to form a pan-Arab military force to respond to extremist threats in the region.

The Islamic State group, which grew out of al-Qaida's former Iraqi affiliate, now holds about a third of Iraq and Syria in its self-declared caliphate. It's called on Muslims across the world to join it. Its online videos and propaganda, including scenes of its mass killings and beheadings, have caught the attention of many extremists

Its influence has grown since it seized large areas of Iraq last summer. Insurgents in Egypt's strategic Sinai Peninsula also have pledged to the group, while another purported affiliate in Yemen claimed a series of suicide bombings in March that killed at least 137 people. On Saturday, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani blamed an affiliate in his country for an attack on a bank branch in the country's east that killed 35 people and wounded 125. An affiliate also operates in Pakistan.

However, it remains unclear what kind of central command-and-control structure the Islamic State group operates.

"The Islamic State in Libya is still focused on this consolidation phase of announcing its presence through these very high-profile executions," said Frederic Wehrey, a senior

associate for the Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "But they face some structural limits in terms of how much local support they can get because they haven't captured real revenue streams."

Meanwhile Sunday, the U.S.-led coalition said Kurdish forces recaptured 11 villages in Iraq's Kirkuk province from the Islamic State group following days of intense clashes. The coalition said the area of about 25 square miles (65 square kilometers) was south of the city of Kirkuk.

The coalition also said Sunday that Iraqi forces had full control over the country's Beiji oil refinery, the nation's largest. Islamic State group fighters had been targeting it for days in attacks and briefly held a small portion of the sprawling complex.

In Anbar province, the extremists recently captured three villages near the city of Ramadi and remain locked in heavy clashes with Iraqi troops. More than 90,000 people have fled the militant's advance there, a United Nations humanitarian agency said.

"Our top priority is delivering life-saving assistance to people who are fleeing — food, water and shelter are highest on the list of priorities," said Lise Grande, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator for Iraq. "Seeing people carrying what little they can and rushing for safety is heart-breaking."

Iraqi troops backed by Shiite militias and U.S.-led airstrikes managed to dislodge the Islamic State group from the northern city of Tikrit earlier this month. But the troops have struggled against the militants in Anbar, which saw some of the heaviest fighting of the eight-year U.S. military occupation that ended in 2011.

Migrants killed in 'religious clash' on Mediterranean boat

Italian police say they have arrested 15 Muslim migrants after they allegedly threw 12 Christians overboard following a row on a boat heading to Italy.

BBC (16.04.2015) - <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32337725> - The Christian migrants, said to be from Ghana and Nigeria, are all feared dead.

In a separate incident, more than 40 people drowned after another migrant boat sank between Libya and Italy.

Almost 10,000 migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean have been rescued in recent days. Italy has called for more help from the EU to handle the crisis.

More than 500 people from Africa and the Middle East have died making the perilous crossing since the start of the year. Earlier this week, 400 people were believed to have drowned when their boat capsized.

The 15 Muslim migrants involved in the row with Christians were arrested in the Sicilian city of Palermo and charged with "multiple aggravated murder motivated by religious hate".

The suspects, who are from the Ivory Coast, Senegal, Mali and Guinea, were among 105 migrants travelling in an inflatable boat that left Libya on Tuesday.

Eyewitnesses told police how the altercation resulted in Christians being thrown overboard, and that some of the survivors had formed human chains to avoid a similar fate.

A threat to Europe: the Islamic state's dangerous gains in Libya

Spiegel (23.02.2015) - The men sitting in Café L'Aurora in Tripoli stare silently into the smartphone Najib Ali is holding in his hand. They're watching a horrific video depicting the decapitation of 21 Egyptian Christians, probably on the beach at Sirte. The victims are wearing orange overalls while their Islamic State (IS) killers are clad in black. The men in the café have already seen the video numerous times and yet they continue to watch it, looking for any details that might indicate the horrific acts didn't really happen.

"Have you ever seen a Libyan that tall?" one asks. And what about the professional camera work? "A major power has to be behind it." And how could Sirte, the hometown of former dictator Moammar Gadhafi, suddenly come under Islamic State rule? The release of the video on Sunday, Feb. 15, shortly before the fourth anniversary of the insurgency against Gadhafi, has led many Libyans to react reflexively with desperate denials of reality.

The truth is that Libya is well on its way to becoming a failed state -- making it the perfect prey for IS. Furthermore, Libya is close to Italy, has plenty of oil and offers a possible corridor to Boko Haram in Nigeria as well as to Islamists in Mali and in the Sahara. Indeed, if IS succeeds in solidifying its presence here, the terrorists could pose a threat to Southern Europe in addition to [destabilizing all of North Africa](#).

The site of the executions appears to be a beach located near the Mahari Hotel in the center of Sirte. The prisoners were reportedly held in the hotel, where a number of foreign jihadists are thought to reside. Several cameras were used to make the professionally produced video. Indeed, it is highly possible that IS propagandists with technical expertise and training from Syria or Iraq produced the Sirte video.

A Show of Force to Libyans

It's no coincidence that the executions took place in Sirte, either. The city is the Islamic State's new center of power in Libya. A short time ago, the terrorists took over TV and radio stations here, which have since been broadcasting jihadist songs and speeches given by IS spokesman Abu Mohammed al-Adnani. In addition, offices of the authorities have been occupied, oil terminals attacked and foreign workers beheaded. Just recently, government employees were even forced to publicly apologize for having worked for the Libyan state. No one dares criticize the new rulers with one witness reported that many are just happy to still be alive. "The massacre is a warning to Europe, but also a show of force aimed at us Libyans."

Last autumn, the Libyan terror group Islamic Youth Shura Council in Derna joined forces with IS, but that port city is surrounded by government troops, limiting the group's movement. The terrorists in Sirte, on the other hand, are free to move to the west and into the Sahara. They've also gained supporters in Benghazi and Tripoli. Meanwhile, members of Islamist militias are also defecting to IS. Libya has in fact become the caliphate's most important colony in North Africa after Egypt. Fighters from around the world are trained here, with some getting deployed locally and others being sent to Syria or Iraq.

The Christian massacre has the potential give the country a final push into open civil war in which everyone is fighting against each other: enemy militias, their foreign supporters and the jihadists. But the dissolution of Libya started long before. In parliamentary elections last summer, Islamist parties associated with the militias in Misrata, an important trade city, fared miserably and have been unwilling to accept their defeat. Under the leadership of the Libyan Dawn, the militias captured the capital city of Tripoli. They deposed the newly elected and internationally recognized parliament and reinstated some members of the previous parliament, leading the elected members to flee to Tobruk.

'IS Has Been Waiting for this Kind of Chaos'

Since that split took place, the country has effectively become home to two parliaments, but also two governments and two armies. Both sides have been fighting each other since last autumn, attacking airports, oil terminals and cities. On the side of the official Libyan government, General Khalifa Haftar is waging war against the Islamists, with military support from Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. On the other side, the Islamists' Dawn alliance is backed by Turkey and Qatar.

The bloody power struggle is leading to Libya's collapse. Oil production has fallen dramatically, from over 1.6 million barrels a day to under 500,000. Revenues are still sufficient to cover the salaries of government workers and to subsidize gasoline, but there isn't enough left over to maintain hospitals or cover necessary infrastructure repairs.

"IS strategists have been waiting for precisely this kind of chaos for some time now," says Libyan security expert Mohamed Garbi. He says the conflict has weakened the state to such a degree that is easy to capture. IS, for its part, would like see this vulnerability persist. In the video, one of the militants stands with a knife in his hand and says, "We will conquer Rome, by the will of Allah." But the Christian massacre was more likely aimed at Geneva peace talks, where delegates of most of the factions in Libya managed to negotiate a ceasefire in January during discussions facilitated by UN special envoy Bernardino Léon. It appears that the beheadings represent an effort on the part of Islamic State to dismantle that success.

Should intense conflict erupt once again in Libya, the jihadists would benefit from the power struggle by constantly shifting its loyalties. It is a strategy that worked well in Syria, even allowing it to militarily outmaneuver stronger rebel groups such as the Nusra Front. IS, after all, had an advantage that the others did not: unity.

A Country Drifts Apart

Such unity has been lacking in a Libyan society that has drifted apart since the victory over Gadhafi. One of the initial failings of the government after the revolution was that it attempted to reintegrate the fighters into civilian life by paying them good wages, but without providing them with prospects of training or jobs. By doing so, it unintentionally provided support for the militias. Just after Gadhafi's fall, Libya's Warriors Affairs Commission counted around 60,000 revolutionaries, a figure that had already grown to 200,000 a year later. There were 500 militias. Given the amount of distrust they had toward the new government, they didn't put down their arms. Instead they took up the hunt for criminals themselves -- or took up illicit activities. For two years, the militias have had the upper hand in the country, extorting parliament and even driving a prime minister out of the country.

Only days after the modest success attained in Geneva, an IS commando stormed the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli, where foreign firms and the illegitimate government had

hunkered down. The attack, which claimed nine lives, further stoked already considerable distrust between the parties in the conflict. In Tripoli, many believed the government in the east had been behind the attack. And now comes the video, a precisely calculated composition of horror in which even the ocean was colored blood red to augment the effect.

Pulling Egypt into Conflict

After the video's release, the Egyptian air force conducted air strikes on jihadist positions. Six of 12 IS bases in Derna were reportedly been hit. It's the kind of response IS might even have desired in the hope that it could draw Egypt into the civil war and further heat up fighting between the factions.

A military intervention in Libya could have disastrous repercussions for Egypt. Already, the policies of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who has denounced virtually all opponents as terrorists, are driving the opposition underground -- possibly even into the hands of Islamic State. Meanwhile, the fact that IS in Sirte released kidnapped foreign workers of the Sunni faith and chose to only murder Christians could further exacerbate conflict between Egyptian religious groups. But there are other factors at play, too, like the 200,000 Egyptian workers still believed to be in Libya and whose return home could spark domestic tensions. Or the fact that other Egyptians are also believed to have been kidnapped.

Islamic State is already expanding its reach to the south. In the city of Sabha, a first meeting took place the week before last between commanders with several Islamist militias to discuss the possible establishment of the Fezzan Province of the Islamic State. If that happened, it would place the smuggling routes for refugees, weapons and drugs in IS hands and create a corridor for the group to other Islamist groups south of Libya.

The group reportedly receives its financing from Abdul Wahhab al-Gayed, a former member of Libya's parliament. As the head of the Border Guard, he received around €250 million from the government in mid-2013. However, the money never went where it was supposed to. It is believed that al-Gayed used it to procure weapons for his militia, which could now be on the verge of joining forces with IS.

Islamists in the coastal regions have also armed themselves. "There are thousands of Kalashnikovs, rocket-propelled grenades and tons of munitions ready for deployment in Derna and Sirte," says one former anti-Gadhafi activist who is well-connected there. The source says the extremists obtained money for the purchases through kidnappings of business people.

There have been other criminal efforts to raise money as well. In October 2013, members of the Ansar al-Sharia terrorist group robbed a central bank money van in Sirte that was reportedly carrying €39 million. Now it appears that Ansa al-Sharia is merging with IS. Last Wednesday night, residents in Sirte observed a long IS motorcade in the city. "Nobody knows where so many fighters and weapons suddenly came from," says one journalist living in Misrata who asked not to be identified. He worries his home city may become the terrorists' next target.

If that happens, IS would make good on the announcement it made in December that it would establish three provinces in Libya -- one in the east, another in the west and a stronghold in the south.

Britain's Coptic Christian community 'scared to be in UK' after Libya killings

David Cameron condemns murder of Egyptian Copts at hands of Isis as Britain's orthodox Christians express anger that more was not done to save victims

The Guardian (16.02.2015) - Among Britain's Coptic Christians there was a sense of stupefied horror, as film of the murder of 21 Egyptian Copts, at the hands of Isis in [Libya](#) sent shock waves throughout the community.

The video of the mass beheading of the 21 prisoners in Libya was released on Sunday, but for days images of captives in regulation orange uniforms, paraded by black-clad gunmen had haunted the international community.

"We have met this news with sorrow and disbelief – although people saw this coming there was a hope that something could be done to change the outcome," said [Bishop Angaelos](#), General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom. "When it came it was so heartless and inhumane."

Angaelos, head of the orthodox Christian community in the UK, received a call from the prime minister, who expressed his condolences for the murder of the guest workers, who were kidnapped in Sirte, on Libya's coast, by Isis members in December and January. A video made of the murders titled "a message signed in blood to the people of the cross", makes reference to the "hostile Egyptian Church".

"The prime minister focused on the fact that these actions are unacceptable by the principles we live by in this country," he said.

That may come of little consolation to UK Coptic Christians, most of whom have relatives in [Egypt](#), some from the very same villages and provinces as the killed hostages.

Egyptian Coptic Christians are the largest Christian community in the Middle East, with an estimated 10-15 million members in Egypt – around 10% of the population. Coptics follow an orthodox strand of [Christianity](#) which requires them to closely follow the church's dogma, which includes fasting for some part of 210 days a year. They formed a community in the UK in the 60s, which now has around 20,000 members. Many of them are now living in fear, said Father Antonious Thabet, a priest at St Mark's church in Kensington.

"We are very scared, some people in my congregation have said they are scared to be in the UK – these people are everywhere," he said. "There is anger against leaders who did nothing. They have to do something, saying that we are sorry this had happened is not enough."

Special services will be held in Coptic churches throughout the UK this week, while peaceful demonstrations of solidarity are planned for the weekend. Magda Sakr, an Egyptian muslim who has lived in the UK for 20 years will be among the mourners.

"People are trying to separate Christian and Muslims, but we are all Egyptian," she said, fighting back tears. "These people have nothing to do with Islam, they are maniacs. This is not about religion, it is about standing up for humanity."

Her friend, Shenouda Shalaby, a doctor at Ealing hospital and a member of Father Antonious congregation, said the world needed to wake up. "We are not fighting an

invasion – this ideology is already here, it is spreading like a cancer,” he said. “To be frank this is only the tip of the iceberg. Unless the world unites, it will be a disaster for all of us.”

Islamic State: Egyptian Christians held in Libya 'killed'

BBC News (16.02.2015) - A video has emerged apparently showing the beheadings of 21 Egyptian Christians who had been kidnapped by Islamic State (IS) militants in Libya.

The footage shows a group wearing orange overalls being forced to the ground and then decapitated.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has said Egypt reserves the right to respond in any way it sees fit.

IS militants claim to have carried out several attacks in Libya, which is in effect without a government.

However, with many armed groups operating in Libya, it is not clear how much power IS actually wields.

National mourning

The kidnapped Egyptian workers, all Coptic Christians, were seized in December and January from the coastal town of Sirte in eastern Libya, now under the control of Islamist groups.

The video of the beheadings was posted online by Libyan jihadists who pledge loyalty to IS. A caption made it clear the men were targeted because of their faith.

"Egypt and the whole world are in a fierce battle with extremist groups carrying extremist ideology and sharing the same goals," President Sisi said.

The beheadings were described as "barbaric" by al-Azhar, the highly regarded theological institution which is based in Egypt.

The Coptic church said it was "confident" Egypt would exact retribution. Egypt has declared seven days of national mourning.

Libya has been in turmoil since 2011 and the overthrow of its then-leader, Col Muammar Gaddafi.

Since then, numerous other militia groups have battled for control.

The head of the US Defense Intelligence Agency warned last month that IS was assembling "a growing international footprint that includes ungoverned and under-governed areas", including Libya.

Libya has two rival governments, one based in Tripoli, the other in Tobruk. Meanwhile, the eastern city of Benghazi, headquarters of the 2011 revolution, is largely in the hands of Islamist fighters, some with links to al-Qaeda.

On Sunday, Italy closed its embassy in Tripoli. Italy, the former colonial power, lies less than 500 miles (750km) from Libya at the shortest sea crossing point.

Italian Premier Matteo Renzi has been calling for the UN to intervene in Libya. Thousands of migrants use the Libyan coast as a starting point to flee the violence and attempt to reach the EU.

UK Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond condemned the beheadings.

"Such barbaric acts strengthen our determination to work with our partners to counter the expanding terrorist threat to Libya and the region," he said.

On Sunday, President Sisi banned all travel to Libya by Egyptian citizens.

Despite the turmoil in Libya, thousands of Egyptians go to the country looking for work.

There had been demonstrations in Egypt calling on the government to do more to secure the release of those held.

Egypt launches air strikes against the Islamic State in Libya, after the beheading of 21 Copts

Asia News (16.02.2015) <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Egypt-launches-air-strikes-against-the-Islamic-State-in-Libya,-after-the-beheading-of-21-Copts-33471.html> - Training camps and military arsenals in Libya targeted. Al-Sisi states that "Egypt and the entire world" must counter the Islamist challenge. Video released of the beheading of 21 Egyptian workers. Strong confessional connotation as a "revenge" against "people of the cross". "We are just south of Rome." Italian embassy in Tripoli evacuated.

The Egyptian Air Force carried out dawn raids on Islamic State (IS) positions in Libya. State television announced the military operation, following the release online of an IS video showing the beheading of 21 Egyptian Copts. The raid targeted training camps and military arsenals near the border with Libya.

Yesterday, after the release of the video on the execution of 21 Egyptians, in a televised speech, President Abdelfattah Al Sisi said that Egypt "reserves the right to respond in a suitable way and time". He also declared seven days of mourning in the country for the killing of 21 Egyptians.

The video shows the 21 hostages handcuffed and wearing the orange jumpsuit of the condemned. After a short walk to a beach, they are made to kneel and are beheaded by 21 masked executioners dressed in black (see photo).

Rumors of the execution had filtered through days before and Egypt had sought confirmations. From the beginning the prisoners were branded as "Copts", emphasizing the confessional character of the execution, although it is likely that 21 victims were in Libya only for work. Most of them came from poor areas of Upper Egypt.

The Coptic Church has however confirmed that those executed are Coptic faithful and "trust" that the perpetrators will be brought to justice. The University of Al Azhar, the undisputed authority of the Islamic world based in Cairo, has condemned the execution as a "barbaric" gesture.

The IS video is titled " A message signed with blood to the nation of the cross " and defines the hostages "people of the cross, followers of the hostile Egyptian Church ". The alleged "hostility" of the Coptic Church is explained in a caption that appears after the beheading, which says: " The filthy blood is just some of what awaits you, in revenge for Camilia and her sisters".

The reference is to an episode dating to 2004, and concerns two women, Wafa 'Constantine and Camelia Shehata, wives of two priests, who had marital problems. According to the jihadists, they converted to Islam and were kidnapped by the Church and hidden. In fact, it is true that women had marital problems, but it is not true that they converted. The late head of Al-Azhar, Tantawi, has decreed that there is no proof of their conversion. In time, the two women were handed over to the Church, for fear of possible kidnapping by Islamic movements, and they were brought to some monasteries. This story regularly returns in the narratives of Muslim fundamentalists to justify the terrorist acts against Christians.

Egypt is alleged to have already launched air strikes against the Islamists in Libya last year.

Since the fall of Gaddafi in 2011, Libya has been plunged into an institutional and military chaos, since many militias are inspired by the jihad. A few months ago some of them officially declared alliance with the IS.

For Al-Sisi " Egypt and the whole world are in a fierce battle with extremist groups carrying extremist ideology and sharing the same goals". As if to confirm, in the video, one of the Executioners with his face covered and waving a knife in front of the camera warns in English: " Today we are in the south of Rome, in the land of Islam Libya... the sea you have hidden Sheikh Osama bin Laden's body in, we swear to Allah we will mix it with your blood".

Yesterday, due to the high tension, Italy closed its embassy in Tripoli, asking all nationals to leave the country.

Egypt urged to free kidnapped Christians in Libya

BosNewsLife (29.01.2015) <http://www.bosnewslife.com/34595-egypt-urged-to-free-kidnapped-christians-in-libya> - Rights activists have urged Egypt's government to help free dozens of Egyptian Christians kidnapped in Libya, amid fears they may be executed by Islamic militants.

In a petition obtained by BosNewsLife, advocacy group International Christian Concern (ICC) asked Cairo to "immediately begin rescue operations on behalf of 27 Egyptian citizens", most of them Coptic Christians.

They were abducted in two separate raids in December and January, including by a group claiming to represent Islamic State militants, Christians said. The IS linked group reportedly claimed responsibility for 21 of the victims calling them "Christian crusaders".

In the petition, ICC said it is concerned that if "swift action is not taken, the kidnapping victims could "face the possibility of enslavement, torture, and execution."

Some Christians have already been killed, including on December 23, when Islamic militants broke into the home of Dr. Magdy Tawfiq in Sirte. The militants murdered Dr. Tawfiq, his wife, and his 13-year-old daughter, Christians told BosNewsLife earlier.

DEATH THREATS

After death threats, Dr. Tawfiq and his family had reportedly tried to secure safe passage back to Egypt, when the attack took place.

Yet, ICC's Advocacy Director Isaac Six told BosNewsLife that so far the Egyptian government "has apparently done little more than acknowledge that the kidnappings took place."

Rights investigators have also expressed concern about minority Christians remaining trapped in sangerous areas of Libya, including many Egyptian Christians also known as "Copts".

Egyptian Christians with relatives in Sirte and other parts of Libya say "many" of their family members remain trapped, with no way to travel without risking further abductions.

INCREASE PROTECTIONS

ICC urged Egypt's government to help increase "protections for the expatriate Coptic community" in Libya "and to facilitate the expeditious return home of Coptic Christians in Libya currently under threat."

Six stressed "It's time for action, not only on behalf of those currently in the hands of [IS] affiliates and other radical groups, but for all of the Coptic Christian workers in Libya who are undeniably at risk of being killed or abducted simply because of their religious identity."

The official hopes "the Egyptian government will heed this call to action and take immediate steps towards rescuing the abductees and securing Coptic communities in Libya."

Egyptian authorities have not yet indicated when and if a rescue operation will be launched.

Libyan militants hold 20 Egyptian Christians hostage

WWM (26.01.2015) www.worldwatchmonitor.com - The kidnapping of at least 20 Coptic Christians in two separate incidents in December and January has been claimed by Libyan militants affiliated with the self-proclaimed Islamic State.

Seven of the Christians were abducted on Dec. 29 while driving by car back to Egypt from the coastal city of Sirte, currently under the control of the Libya Dawn alliance of Islamist militants. Another 13 Copts were seized Jan. 3 in Sirte by armed men who raided the building where they lived. The attackers checked the men's Egyptian I.D. papers, taking hostage those who were Christians and letting the Muslims go free.

"We were afraid to go out because we might be targeted," said Mila Ishak, 27, who had been living in the same housing compound in Sirte as the kidnap victims. At about 2:30 a.m. on Jan. 3, he told World Watch Monitor, he received a cell-phone call from a friend who occupied a room in an adjacent building.

Abducted

The friend, Ishak said, "called me again and with fear and a low voice, told me that they were able to break the door of the room beside his room, and had abducted all their six friends who were inside the room." Ishak said the intruders tried to break into the room from which his friend was calling, but gave up and left.

Then the intruders entered the building where Ishak lived. He said he heard one of them command another resident of the building, who was up at that hour, to "show them the rooms of the Christians in the building," and to rouse the men sleeping inside. The man pounded on the door where seven men, all Christians, were sleeping.

"I was hearing everything," Ishak said. "One of the seven residents of the room . . . awoke and opened the iron door of the room. They entered the room and abducted all of them too."

Next, he said, came the pounding on the door to his own room. But as there were only three pairs of shoes outside his door, compared to the seven pairs outside the first room, one of the intruders said "leave them. That is enough. Let's go."

Ishak said he and 10 others paid a Libyan smuggler to get them back into Egypt on Jan. 5.

Still alive

Photos of all 20 kidnapped Copts were posted on an official IS website on Jan. 12. Their faces have all been identified by relatives in their home villages in Upper Egypt's Minya province. None of the families have been contacted by the kidnappers. Although Egyptian officials say they are communicating with the Libyan authorities, the government has only confirmed that the men are still alive.

Several relatives of the kidnapped men told World Watch Monitor their pleas to Egyptian authorities have gone nowhere.

"Two weeks (have) passed since the time of their abduction and the foreign ministry hasn't done anything to help us," said Hany Adly, whose brother, Gaber, was among the seven men abducted Dec. 29. "We haven't seen any positive step from them."

As many as 1.5 million Egyptian workers remain caught in the chaotic fighting between warring factions in Libya, where an internationally recognized government in Tobruk in the east is locked in conflict with a rival government in Tripoli in the west. On Jan. 25, the Ansar al-Sharia group based in eastern Libya confirmed the death of its leader, Mohammad al-Zahawi, injured last October while battling government troops in Bengazi. Militias allied with Tripoli accuse Egypt of supporting the Tobruk side, although Cairo denies military involvement.

But Egypt's Coptic Christians have been particularly targeted recently. On Dec. 23, two Coptic doctors in Sirte were shot to death in their home in front of their two small children. Their teenage daughter's bullet-riddled body was found in the desert several days later.

Isis claims abduction of 21 Christians in Libya

AFP (12.01.2015) - Islamic State's branch in Libya has claimed the abduction of 21 Christians, a monitor reported on Monday, as Egypt confirmed that 20 of its citizens were being held in the country.

"Urgent. Soldiers of the Islamic State captured 21 Christian crusaders," the jihadists said in a statement picked up by the Site Intelligence Group.

Three pictures showing several men were published alongside the terse statement, which did not specify when the men were abducted and did not reveal their nationality.

A spokesman for the Egyptian foreign ministry said 20 Egyptians had been abducted in two separate incidents in neighbouring Libya. He did not say when they were kidnapped.

Badr Abdel Atti did not specify their religious affiliation but said seven Egyptians and 13 others abducted separately in Libya were still being held by their captors.

There have been conflicting reports on the fates of two groups of Egyptian Coptic Christians reportedly abducted in recent weeks. A source close to the Libyan government said on 3 January that the Islamist militant group Ansar al-Sharia had kidnapped the 20 men in the city of Sirte over several days.

Two days later a tribal source said 13 of the men had been detained by people-smugglers and later released, but the information was never confirmed.

The Isis statement, which does not list any demands for the release of the men, said they had been taken "in various areas of Tripoli province" – referring to a former administrative region that includes Sirte.

The coastal city of Sirte is in the hands of Islamist militias including Ansar al-Sharia, which the UN added to its terror list last month over links to al-Qaida and for running Isis training camps.

More than three years since Muammar Gaddafi was ousted and killed in the 2011 Nato-backed uprising, Libya is awash with weapons and powerful militias and has rival governments and parliaments.

Tens of thousands of Egyptians work in Libya, mainly in the construction sector, and they have been targeted as the country has descended into chaos.

In February, the bodies of seven Egyptian Christians who had been shot were found near Libya's second city, Benghazi, parts of which are held by Islamist militias.

Libya violence: Seized Coptic Christians 'freed' in Libya

BBC News (05.01.2015) - Thirteen Coptic Christian workers from Egypt have been freed after being seized in Libya, an official said.

On Saturday, eyewitnesses in the northern city of Sirte said gunmen took the Christian men in the middle of the night from a residential compound.

But a tribal leader reportedly insisted on Monday that they had been detained by people smugglers, not kidnapped.

The incident was the latest in a series of recent attacks on Egyptian Christians working in Libya.

Local residents said the masked gunmen had separated the Christians from the Muslims before handcuffing them and taking them away in cars.

The Egyptian authorities have not confirmed the release, first reported by Libya's al-Wasat news website.

'Dispute over money'

Muftah Marzuq, head of the council of elders in the coastal city of Sirte, said the men were released after negotiations between the gunmen and local officials.

"The Egyptians were held by a group that deals in illegal people smuggling, because of a dispute involving money and transportation to the Harawa region east of Sirte," the AFP news agency quoted Mr Marzuq as saying.

News of their disappearance emerged when a source close to the government accused Islamist group Ansar al-Sharia of having kidnapped the 13 Christians.

The incident came just a few days after seven other Coptic Christians from Egypt were reportedly abducted at a fake checkpoint in Sirte as they tried to leave the city.

Mr Marzuq made no mention of the earlier kidnapping.

In early December, there was also an attack on the home of an Egyptian Coptic doctor in Sirte, in which he and his wife were killed. Local reports said the couple's daughter was also found dead after being abducted.

Libya is home to a large community of both Muslim and Coptic Egyptians, with most working in the construction sector.

The country has been plagued by instability and infighting since the toppling of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

Rival militias now control most of the country including the two largest cities, Tripoli and Benghazi, and Sirte has become a safe haven for Islamist fighters.
