

Egypt

Response to Information Request:	Number: EGY98001.nyc
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Subject:	Egypt: Information on the Islamic Fundamentalist group <i>al-Gama'a al-Islamiya</i>
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Query:

Request for information on the Islamic Fundamentalist group, the *al-Gama'a al Islamiya*, operating out of Egypt.

Response:

There are many different spellings for the *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*. In accordance with the most common spelling and to maintain consistency within this response, I will use the spelling *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*. The *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* is an Islamic opposition group whose aim is to overthrow the government of President Hosni Mubarak. The *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* is not a single group; it has become factionalized. The original group has broken down into smaller factions, in part due to the imprisonment and/or exile of its leaders (ABC Nightline 3 Dec. 1997). Currently, the spiritual leader of the *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, a blind sheik named Abdel-Rahman, is serving a life sentence in the U.S. for plotting to blow up the World Trade Center and other New York landmarks (*The Scotsman* 18 Nov. 1997).

Overall, the *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* avoids conflicts with Americans, as its leaders feel they would be fighting a powerful adversary that they cannot match. Rather the group focuses on fighting its enemies within Egypt, mainly the government (*Mideast Mirror* 10 Aug. 1998). The *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* began fighting the state in 1992 when Egyptian volunteers who fought the Islamic mujahedeen in Afghanistan returned (AI Mar. 1997).

Conflicts with armed Islamic groups in Egypt since 1992 have claimed the lives of more than 1,000 people on both sides, and have been blamed for many human rights abuses (AI Mar. 1997). The *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* has been associated with the following attacks:

- November 18, 1997: 71 tourists were killed by Islamic militants outside the Temple of Hatsheut, which is across the Nile from the town of Luxor and near the Valley of the Kings (*The Scotsman* 18 Nov. 1997).
- September 18, 1997: 2 gunmen (believed to be members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*) killed 9 tourists and injured 35 others on a crowded tourist bus in Cairo (*The Evening Standard* 18 Sept. 1997).
- April 18, 1996: 4 armed men killed 18 Greek tourists including 14 women outside a hotel in Cairo, while 15 others were injured including nine women and an Egyptian man. The *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* claimed responsibility for this attack saying they

had mistaken the Greek tourists for Israeli nationals and attacked in retaliation for the Israeli attacks in Southern Lebanon (AI July 1996).

- February 24, 1996: 8 people were killed, including 6 Coptic Christians, when 2 armed men (allegedly members of the *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*) opened fire on civilians sitting outside their house in al-'Uthmaniya village near al-Badari in the governorate of Asyut (AI July 1996).
- February 20, 1996: 2 Coptic Christians brothers were killed when 3 gunmen (believed to be members of the *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*) attacked house in the village of Sahel Salim (AI July 1996).
- February 19, 1996: On the eve of 'Id al-Fitr, 3 gunmen believed to be members of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, shot and killed 5 civilians in a coffee shop in the village of al-'Aqal al-Bahri (AI July 1996).
- January - April 1996: at least 46 civilians throughout Egypt were killed by members of armed opposition groups (AI July 1996).

According to the 1997 Amnesty International report, "...the *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* has been charged with plotting to overthrow the regime, threatening peace and national unity through the use of violence, and illegally importing weapons and ammunition into the country..." amongst other things (AI 1997). In July 1997, six imprisoned leaders of the *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* called for a cease fire followed by talks with authorities. However, an unyielding leader of *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, Rifai Ahmed Taha who is based in Afghanistan, denied any offer of a cease fire (AP 10 Feb. 1998).

The *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*, *Gihad*, and *Talai'al-Fatah* have been responsible for serious human rights abuses and have carried out attacks on the Coptic minority, foreign tourists, and opposition writer Farag Foda (AI March 1997). Experts say that Osama Bin Laden may have subcontracted the *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya* to bomb the embassies in Africa (*The New York Post* 8 Aug 1998).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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