

Eshhad (Testify-شاهد): Final Report

Section I

(a) Header

Eshhad
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(b) Project Goals

Although sectarian conflict and violence is not a new phenomenon in Egypt, it has become increasingly difficult to accurately document its occurrence and rise. Under the shadow of this context, Eshhad was born to fill a vital information gap and provide a clearer picture of religious discrimination and violence within Egypt. Eshhad, the Arabic word for "testify," aims to do exactly that: to provide a simultaneously qualitative and quantitative testimony of the policies and practices implicating minorities in the Middle East. Eshhad hosts a database that collects publicly available information, a map that geo-references the recorded incidents, minority group background profiles, and analytical commentary.

Eshhad seeks to encourage transparency and to influence policy by explaining the context in which sectarianism occurs throughout the Middle East. While Eshhad is currently focused on highlighting the proliferation of sectarian attacks on minority groups in Egypt, its long-term vision will expand to include sectarianism against all marginalized groups in the region as a whole.

(c) Other Fundraising Efforts

After two years of independent efforts and with the absolutely-necessary financial and professional backing of the Davis Projects for Peace award, Eshhad pursued the opportunity to incubate at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP), a local DC-based non-profit that conducts extensive advocacy and research in the region, as an autonomous project. By seeking this incubation opportunity, Eshhad was able to ensure that it received high-quality-level website development, map personalization, the support of a larger research team, and an expanded network.

Eshhad continues to enjoy autonomy and upon completion of the incubation period, will continue to exist as a stand-alone project.

(d) Project Details

In its newly-launched state, Eshhad has been able to provide the following tools:

- **Database:** The database presents the information embodied by the interactive form in downloadable spreadsheet format.
- **Map:** The live map component of the website showcases incidents of sectarian attacks and violence. The data represents the most comprehensive set tracking this information, detailing the location, players, victims, and responses to each data point. At present, Eshhad's geographical scope is limited to Egypt; in the near future, Eshhad will expand to remaining countries in the region.
- **Submission Capacity:** The website enables victims or witnesses of sectarian attacks to submit reports for investigation, substantiation, and eventual incorporation into the database and map.

- **Minority and Issue Reports:** This segment of the website will provide both vital background information on the minority groups impacted by sectarianism in Eshhad’s target countries, alongside regular reports on statistics and findings.
- **Analytical Commentary:** Written by experts and specialists who work in the field, analysis is provided to interpretations of the conclusions that can be drawn from the data provided in the database and the map.

In the next stages of its growth, Eshhad seeks to (1) expand its database to include sectarian attacks occurring in Egypt between January 1, 2011 to August 14, 2013 and eventually, (2) to expand its database to cover sectarian attacks in other countries in the Middle East.

Challenges ahead and steps to be taken to realize such goals will include: (1) determining the best growth plan (ie, country-based or timeline-based), (2) maintaining a functioning volunteer research staff, (3) expanding means of submission via SMS short code and/or mobile application, (4) maintaining the existing website, Facebook, and Twitter sites beyond the incubation period and (5) retaining and managing a funding source.

Section II

(a) Eshhad and Peace

The team behind Eshhad believes that a society's treatment of its minorities is a barometer of the levels of freedom, tolerance, and democracy within the country. A nation that cannot ensure the liberties and freedoms of its most marginalized populations is one that is inherently incapable of meeting its domestic and international legal obligations and even more basically, unsuccessful in ensuring the basic provision of life, liberty, and security. Thus, when a country enshrines inherently unequal and discriminatory practices in the law, when it allows perpetrators of religiously-motivated violence to continue their actions with impunity, and when it denies the presence of a deeply-enshrined problem, it is failing to live up to the democratic principles that it has subscribed to. Further, it is failing to provide its citizens with access to a safe and peaceful coexistence.

The Middle East has long been plagued by an unrecognized, neglected, and festering sectarianism that has crept its way into state policies and personal practices. Schools allow curriculum that incites against religious minorities; national identification cards highlight religion, allowing police officers to distinguish in treatment; archaic laws set forth starkly-different processes for the approval of houses of worship depending on religious affiliation; and the state continues to encourage informal reconciliation sessions that often result in the forcible removal of the victim and his family, rather than the prosecution of the perpetrator.

With sectarianism serving as a source of violent tension in many Middle Eastern societies, Eshhad seeks to play an essential role in providing the data that is necessary for effective legal resolution and policy reform to address such tension, thus mitigating violence and ensuring peaceful coexistence among members of Egyptian and Middle Eastern societies.

(b) Personal Statement

It is only by identifying the problem, documenting the context in which it occurs, and beginning a much-needed dialogue on the way ahead, will each country in the Middle East truly be able to stem the religiously-motivated discrimination and violence that it hosts. Eshhad aims to become a part of this necessary process.