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EGYPT Violence claims another life and injures five

A 71 year-old Christian man was shot dead and his wife and four others injured after a 23 year-old off-duty policeman opened fire on an Assiut train bound for Cairo on January 11, 2011. The Egyptian Interior Ministry has blamed the attack on the gunman's mental instability, and said that his motive was not sectarian.

The shooting came hours after Egypt recalled its envoy to the Vatican and accused Pope Benedict XVI of "meddling" in Egypt's internal affairs after he had urged Egypt, Iraq and Nigeria to do more to allow Christian citizens to practice their faith in safety. In another response, Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, imam of Al Azhar University, said in a statement that the treatment of Christians should be as citizens of Egypt and thus an internal affair. Abdel Rahman Shaheen, spokesman for Egypt's Ministry of Health, added that the ministry sent a plane to Christians wounded in the Assiut train shooting. Such treatment is usually reserved for foreign tourists.

This latest shooting comes less than two weeks after the bombing of a Coptic church in Alexandria on New Year's Eve in which 23 people died and 80 were injured. Tensions are further heightened by the long-awaited announcement of the outcome of the Nag Hammadi trial, scheduled for January 16. The sectarian shooting claimed the lives of 6 Copts and 1 Muslim security guard in January 2010.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "Christian Solidarity Worldwide is encouraged by the Egyptian government's treatment of victims in the aftermath of the latest tragic loss of life in Egypt. We call for more measures to be taken to stem sectarian violence and to tackle the extremism at its heart. We ask for the release of all protesters unfairly detained in Egypt at this time and for justice for victims of sectarian attacks."