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EGYPT Peaceful protest ends with dozens dead

A variety of sources indicate between 24 and 38 people were killed and hundreds were injured in Cairo yesterday when Egyptian police and armed forces fired tear gas and live ammunition at a peaceful march protesting the destruction of a Coptic church in Mari Nab, Aswan. CSW's sources indicate that the figure may be "at least 41," though this figure remains unverified at present.

The Cairo protest was supported by members of the Muslim community, and was part of a series of simultaneous demonstrations that occurred in Alexandria, Luxor, Qena, Minya and Beni Suef. In addition to drawing attention to the attack on the church in Aswan, the demonstrators were also requesting an effective conclusion to investigations into a spate of sectarian attacks, and the passing of a new law governing the building of churches, which may serve to limit the frequency of these attacks.

According to local sources, members of the security forces surrounded and attacked the marchers as soon as they arrived at the state television station in Cairo's Maspero suburb. The marchers were also allegedly pelted by people within the TV station itself. Most of the casualties suffered gunshot wounds. Other victims were severely beaten. However, several died or were seriously injured when members of the security forces deliberately drove at the 150,000-strong crowd in armored vehicles.

In a worrying development, while the attack was underway, the security forces are reported to have forcibly closed at least two independent media sources, while state television broadcast inciting statements against "Coptic protesters". These included claims that the security forces were protecting the TV station from "angry" Copts, that the allegedly armed marchers had killed one officer and injured 20 others, that "foreign agendas" were at work, and a call for people to take to the streets in order to "protect" the army. In a possible response to the latter, men in civilian clothing were later spotted amongst security personnel as they attacked protesters, and Cairo's Coptic Hospital, which received most of the dead and injured, came under a two-hour attack by a group of men who approached the premises chanting "Islamiya, Islamiya".

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide said: "We are deeply saddened by yesterday's events, and our thoughts and prayers are with the families of the bereaved, and with those who were injured. This was effectively an attack by an interim regime that has overrun its mandate, on Egyptians of every creed who maintain a vision for a nation characterized by justice, freedom and equality of citizenship and opportunity, a vision which was the original driving force for change. What is particularly appalling is the premeditated nature of the violence, and the accompanying propaganda campaign by the state-run media. This no longer appears to be a case of official reluctance or inability to address sectarian violence. Instead, it increasingly resembles a deliberate campaign to ignite targeted ethno-religious violence that seems to enjoy significant official sanction. The international community must send a clear and strong message to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces that such unwarranted brutality against its own citizens will not be tolerated."

Notes to Editor:

1. For video of protesters being attacked and charged by armored vehicles, click [here](#).
2. On September 30, St George's Church in Meri Nab village, Aswan Governate, was attacked by over 1,000 villagers and destroyed, along with four Coptic homes. Coptic businesses were also vandalized.