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EGYPT Christian homes and businesses destroyed in sectarian violence

Christian homes and business were looted in violence that broke out following the death of a Muslim man in the Egyptian village of Dahshur on August 1, 2012. An estimated 120 Christian families had reportedly fled the village the previous day in anticipation of revenge attacks.

In a statement, Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi has promised to punish culprits of the Dahshur violence to the “full extent of the law”. The President’s spokesperson stated that President Morsi “would not allow anyone to attack public or private property or terrorise any Egyptian citizen.”

The incident began on the July 27 when a Coptic launderer, Sameh Samy, burnt the shirt of a Muslim client, Ahmad Ramadan. It is claimed that despite both men agreeing to settle the grievance that evening, Mr. Ramadan returned in the afternoon with a 3,000-strong armed mob, which surrounded Mr. Samy’s house and business. As fighting raged, Mr. Samy eventually hurled a Molotov cocktail from the roof of his house, which hit a Muslim passer-by named Moaz, who was taken to hospital with third degree burns from which he later died.

According to the Assyrian International News Agency (AINA), 120 Christian families fled the village, with only one family remaining, following threats by clerics and the victim’s family to exact revenge. Police later arrested and detained Mr. Samy, his father and brother and charged them with murder and possession of explosives. Despite five arrest warrants being issued for five Muslims involved in the attack, they remain at large.

Following the violence and destruction, Coptic Christians from the Maspero Coptic Youth Federation and the Coalition of Egypt’s Copts staged demonstrations outside the presidential palace. The Coptic Orthodox Church issued a statement criticizing authorities “for not dealing firmly with the events, demanding the speedy arrest of perpetrators, the provision of security to the village Copts, their return to their homes, and monetary compensation for all those affected.”

Andrew Johnston, Advocacy Director of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, “CSW is very concerned at the latest incident of sectarian violence in Egypt, and the seeming continuation of the culture of “collective punishment”, whereby an entire Coptic community is punished for the actions of one individual. It is worrying that Christians are increasingly being displaced and forced from their homes for fear of imminent attack. While CSW commends the statement by President Morsi, we call upon him to honor his promise to pursue true justice for victims of violence. In order to end impunity, victims must be adequately compensated for the damage to or loss of their properties and their safe return to their homes in Dahshur must be ensured.”