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## **EGYPT | Siege on Coptic Cathedral Highlights Escalating Sectarian Violence**

At least two people were killed and over 90 injured April 7 during a siege on St. Mark's Coptic Cathedral in Abbasiya, Cairo, in the aftermath of a funeral for four Coptic men.

Hundreds of mourners had attended the funeral of 25-year-old Morqos Kamel, 35-year-old Victor Saad, 45-year-old Mansour Attia and 25-year-old Essam Tawadros, who died of gunshot wounds during a mob attack on April 5 on the Christian community in Khorous, a suburb 10 miles north of Cairo, following unsubstantiated claims that Christians had daubed offensive imagery on the walls of an Islamic institution.

When the mourners attempted to leave the premises, they were pelted with stones, petrol bombs, and Molotov cocktails, forcing them to seek shelter in the grounds of the cathedral. As stones and other missiles continued to be hurled from the roofs of surrounding buildings and by people who had climbed the walls of the cathedral, young Coptic men took up sticks and rocks to retaliate.

When police eventually arrived, they fired teargas into the grounds of the cathedral, and did not intervene as the attack continued for five hours. Violence also continued in Khorous, with attacks on Christian-owned shops.

A marked escalation in sectarian violence that began with the 2011 Uprising has continued under President Mohammed Morsi's tenure without effective official intervention. Members of Egypt's Coptic community have been physically attacked or killed. Their homes, businesses and church buildings have been destroyed and several young women have been abducted. Perpetrators are rarely apprehended, encouraging an atmosphere of impunity.

In a comment on Sunday's violence, His Grace Bishop Angaelos General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom said, "Today, Egypt saw an unprecedented attack on the See of the Pope of Alexandria, the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate in Cairo, by mobs, with the

police arriving far too late and doing very little, if anything at all, to prevent them. Reports have indicated that Egypt's president, Mr. Mohammed Morsi had made telephone contact with the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, saying that 'the protection of the lives of all Egyptians, Muslims and Christian, is the responsibility of the state.' It is now clear that the state needs to take that responsibility far more seriously."

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive at Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "We offer our condolences to the families who lost loved ones in the violence in Abbasiya and Khorous. The significance of a direct and sustained assault on the heart of the Coptic Orthodox Church cannot be overemphasized, and is symbolic of the official failure to protect the Coptic community in an adequate and timely manner. The seeming unwillingness of the security services to discharge their responsibility to protect both the church and the mourners is wholly unacceptable. It is yet another example of the culture of impunity that surrounds sectarian attacks and sends the message that not all Egyptian citizens are equal under the law. Egypt's progress as a democratic state will be measured by the government's ability to guarantee security, equality and fundamental freedoms to all of its citizens, and it is time for words to be matched with actions in this regard."