



8.19.13

EGYPT | Sectarian Attacks Mount as Violence Continues

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is deeply concerned at the continuing violence in Egypt, which has left more than 830 people dead, including 70 policemen. At least 60 churches have been targeted, along with Christian schools, homes, businesses and even an orphanage.

In Minya, Beni Suef, Fayoum and Assiut, Christian homes and businesses reportedly received leaflets warning them to leave or face reprisals by Islamists. There are also reports of Christian homes and businesses in Minya being marked with black X's to single them out for attack.

In a particularly disturbing incident reported by the Associated Press, Islamists who attacked and looted a Franciscan school in Beni Suef paraded three nuns "like war prisoners", while two other female employees were sexually harassed and abused. Churches that were attacked or destroyed during the recent violence were unable to hold Sunday services on Aug. 18, while others cancelled their services for fear of attack. The Egypt Independent reports that Virgin Mary and Priest Ibram monastery in Degla, south of Minya, did not hold prayers on Sunday for the first time in 1,600 years. Nevertheless, there are increasing reports of moderate Muslims coming to the assistance of Christians.

At least seven Christians have been killed and many more injured since the ousting of former-President Morsi by the military on July 3. Islamists have blamed Copts for conspiring in the removal of the former president, with some calling for retaliatory attacks. A Facebook page purporting to belong to the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) in Helwan, Cairo, stated: "The Pope of the Church is involved in the removal of the first elected Islamist president. The Pope of the Church alleges Islamic Shari'a is backwards, stubborn, and reactionary." It went on to say: "After all this people ask why they burn the churches." The FJP has denied inciting sectarian violence, denouncing a number of Facebook pages as fake.

Egyptian authorities have confirmed that 36 Islamists died in police custody, while at least 24 policemen were ambushed and killed in the Sinai region on Aug. 18.

In other news, judicial authorities have ordered the release of former President Hosni Mubarak, who has been detained on a variety of charges since 2011.

CSW's Press Officer Kiri Kankhwende said, "We send our condolences to those who have lost loved ones, regardless of their religious or political affiliation. The sectarian targeting of the Coptic community by Morsi supporters, in misplaced retaliation for the actions of the army, cannot be divorced from the continuing campaign of defamation and disinformation emanating from key Brotherhood figures regarding the Church's role in Morsi's ousting. Both the violence and the disinformation that fuels it are unacceptable and should be condemned in the strongest terms. While it is deeply encouraging to hear of moderate Muslims coming to the assistance of their Christian neighbors, the responsibility to protect lies ultimately with the Egyptian authorities. We therefore renew our call for the interim government to ensure comprehensive security to all Egyptians, and also urge and pray for peace and reconciliation."