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EGYPT | Coptic Bishop Survives Assassination Attempt

The General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Minya survived an attempted assassination on Sept. 30, when unknown gunmen opened fire on his entourage in the village of Al-Sarw (el Sario) in Abu Qurqas, Minya Province.

The assassination attempt occurred as His Grace Bishop Makarios was travelling by car to offer condolences to the family of Karim Samir Lamaee, who was killed during recent attacks on the Christian community. As assailants opened fire on the vehicle, the driver managed to reach the home of a local Copt, where the bishop and his entourage took refuge. The attackers pursued them and fired at the house for over an hour, damaging doors, windows, and walls. The police were called but arrived 90 minutes after the gunmen had left the scene. All involved, including Bishop Makarios, were unharmed.

In a comment to His Grace Bishop Angaelos, General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom, Bishop Makarios described his ordeal as “an indication that while steps are being taken towards reconciliation, there are those who still want to delay us.” In a statement, Bishop Angaelos reiterated “the need for a sufficient level of law and order be restored because every Egyptian deserves to receive equal protection under that law.”

The attack on Bishop Makarios has been condemned by the Maspero Youth Union, a Coptic rights group and by the Al-Kalema Centre for Human Rights, which called on the Minister of Interior to “arrest the perpetrators and bring them to speedy trial.”

The Governor of Minya described the attack as an isolated incident and not a sectarian one. Sectarian violence has escalated as a direct consequence of hate speech by Muslim Brotherhood supporters, who accuse the Coptic community of playing a prominent role in the removal of former President Morsi despite the participation of Muslims, Christians, atheists, and others in the massive protests that led to his departure. Christian homes, businesses, and churches have been targeted, looted and destroyed, while in some villages Copts have been forced to pay jizya tax. Direct threats have been made against Coptic Pope Tawadros II and other public figures. The interim government’s preoccupation with constitutional and economic

matters, as well as a focus on combating Islamist extremism in the Sinai region, may have contributed to a continuing lack of adequate protection for Copts and other religious minorities, particularly in Upper Egypt.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, “CSW condemns the attack on Bishop Makarios in the strongest terms, and applauds the spirit of reconciliation demonstrated, yet again, by the Coptic community in the face of great hardship. We are also encouraged by early signs that the country’s new Constitution will protect the right to freedom of religion and belief, and hope for an inclusive political process to ensure peaceful transition to democratic rule in which every Egyptian can enjoy the full rights and privileges of citizenship. However, while the fact that none were injured in the sustained and violent attack on the Bishop’s entourage is a cause for thanksgiving, it is deeply worrying that adequate and timely protection is still not available to communities under siege. CSW urges the interim government to ensure that security forces respond quickly and effectively to sectarian incidents, and to act swiftly to silence the hate speech that generally precedes and incites such incidents.”