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EGYPT | CSW Calls On Government to Secure Justice For Victims

As Coptic Orthodox communities around the world on Oct. 9 commemorate the second anniversary of what has become known as the Maspero Massacre, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling on Egypt's interim government to secure justice for the victims.

At least 27 people died and over 300 were injured when a peaceful march composed of Copts and Muslims was attacked by the security forces on Oct. 9 2011. The crowd had marched to the Maspero headquarters of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union to protest the destruction of a church in Aswan and to call for equal rights for the Coptic community. When the protesters reached the Maspero building, they were surrounded by security officials, attacked with rocks and live ammunition, and armored vehicles were driven directly at them, killing several. As the violence continued, State TV blamed protestors for initiating the violence, claimed the first deaths were those of the security forces, and called on the surrounding community to rise up and "defend" the armed forces.

The families of Maspero victims continue to wait for justice, and in particular, the arrests and trials of those who incited and justified the violence. In the two years since Maspero, only three low-ranking soldiers have been prosecuted and sentenced to between two and three years on a lesser charge of manslaughter of 14 of the 27 victims. Several civilians were wrongfully arrested in relation to these events, including prominent bloggers and activists, but were later released.

An informal coalition of political groups has called for a silent protest in front of the Maspero buildings on Oct. 9, while also reiterating the demands of the Jan. 25 Revolution, including the right to Freedom of Religion and belief, and the need for a unified law to govern the construction and repair of houses of worship.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "On the second anniversary of the Maspero Massacre, CSW, once again, offers condolences to those who lost loved ones and who still

await justice. This particularly appalling attack on a peaceful crowd of Christian and Muslim men, women and children remains emblematic of a long-standing culture of incitement and impunity either enacted or facilitated at state level. Conversely, the composition of the protest is symbolic of the spirit of the 2011 Revolution, and the Egyptian people must be commended for their continuing efforts towards reconciliation and unity. CSW calls on the interim government to distinguish itself from its predecessors by ensuring justice for the victims, the passing of a unified law for houses of worship, and equality of citizenship for all.”