



9.26.14

EGYPT | Investigation Called for into Violent Police Raid

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling on the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior to launch an urgent and transparent investigation into raids conducted by police in Al-Minya on Sept. 23, in which members of the Coptic community were harassed and assaulted, their homes and property destroyed, and 12 people were detained.

The raids occurred after members of the Coptic community protested outside the police station in Samalout Town in Minya Province on Sept. 16, demanding police action over the abduction of a Christian woman. According to the police, some of the protestors threw Molotov cocktails at the police station, leading to the arrest of over 30 protestors.

In the early hours of the following morning, police stormed the homes and properties of local Copts, destroyed property and physically abused residents, including an elderly woman and children, referring to them as infidels. The police also tied up a number of men and detained 12 people, allegedly on spurious grounds. Samalout Misdemeanour Court has since released those detained.

Egypt's Christian community has recently experienced an increase in kidnappings, intimidation, abuse and killings, particularly in Al-Minya, Assiut, Sohag and other governorates in Upper Egypt. Perpetrators, including Islamist militants, often kidnap Coptic men, women and children for ransom or in revenge for the removal of Islamist President Mohammed Morsi in July 2013, which some erroneously blame on the Coptic community. There are longstanding allegations that the authorities have failed to provide sufficient protection for the community, and the inadequate police response has engendered a climate of impunity.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "It is troubling to learn the Christian community was targeted by the police, even though 30 people had already been arrested in connection with violence at the protest. The new Egyptian constitution states in Article 64 that freedom of belief is absolute, and in article 9 the State undertakes to ensure equal opportunity for all citizens without discrimination. Such acts by the security forces constitute a serious breach of the constitution, as does the alleged failure of local authorities to protect Coptic communities from kidnap and extortion. An urgent and transparent investigation into the incident in Samalout is needed in order to ensure that the full facts are established and those guilty of acting inappropriately are brought to justice. We also urge the Egyptian authorities to be more proactive in ensuring that the Coptic communities which currently suffer extortion and abductions are assisted and protected."