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EGYPT | Coptic Homes, Property Attacked

Homes and property belonging to the Coptic community of Qarayyat al Bayda village near Alexandria were attacked June 17 by angry crowds protesting at rumors that a house under construction was being turned into a church.

According to Daily News Egypt, the house owner, Naeem Aziz, also known as Maurice Aziz, stated he was building the new house for his son. However, after Friday prayers June 17, a large crowd attacked the house and the building materials being used in its construction. In addition Aziz and his brother Moussa were assaulted and adjacent houses and property were attacked and looted, including a community center belonging to the local Church of the Holy Virgin and the Archangel Michael. A car belonging to a priest, Father Karass, was damaged and a nearby motorcycle set ablaze.

Ramy Kashwaa, a local Coptic activist who witnessed the events first-hand said, "Had it not been for the intervention of our sane Muslim brothers, the pastor could have died."

A video filmed at the time of the attack shows the large crowd that gathered chanting phrases including, "We don't want a church."

The video also shows the moment the security services arrived at the scene. Aziz told the Copts Today website that instead of protecting him, his family and their property, the security services allowed the destruction, violence and looting to continue. The police then arrested six Copts including Aziz and his brother, along with six Muslims. While the six Muslims were freed shortly afterward, the Copts were released at dawn June 18 and charged with holding prayers without permission and building without permit.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "We are disturbed to learn of the sectarian violence in Qarayyat al Bayda. Our prayers are with those who have been injured and whose homes and property have been damaged and looted. We are concerned at the failure of the security services to ensure the safety of the Coptic Community and at the

arrest of six Copts on spurious charges. This incident underscores the urgent constitutional requirement for the House of Representatives to issue a law regulating the construction and renovation of houses of worship in a manner that guarantees the right of Christians to worship in community with others. We urge the Egyptian Government to ensure that security officers nationwide provide equal and adequate service to every community, regardless of religion. The security officers who failed to apprehend the aggressors and provide adequate protection to the Coptic Community should be prosecuted alongside with the perpetrators of these crimes.”