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EGYPT | State of Emergency Following Church Attacks

The Egyptian government declared a three-month state of emergency, three days of mourning and increased security following attacks on two churches in northern Egypt on April 9.

Daesh (Islamic State) has claimed responsibility for the attacks, in which 44 died and scores were injured. The first bomb was detonated inside St. George's Church in the city of Tanta, 74 miles to the north of Cairo, where the bomber evaded security killing 27 and wounding 78, according to the Ministry of Health.

Families, children and church deacons were reportedly among the casualties. In a show of unity in the immediate aftermath of the bombing, men and women rushed to mosques to donate blood for the injured. The victims were buried in the church grounds later that evening, following autopsies.

A few hours later, 17 people died and 48 were injured when a bomber detonated a device after being prevented from entering St. Mark's Cathedral in Alexandria, where the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church Pope Tawadros II was conducting the Palm Sunday Service. The casualties included four police officers, three of them female, who had intercepted the bomber. The Coptic victims will be buried at St. Mina Monastery in Mariut, Alexandria on April 10.

The attacks, which targeted the Christian community during a significant religious festival and at a time of maximum church attendance, were widely condemned, including by the United Nations (UN) Secretary General, the UN Security Council and Pope Francis, who will be visiting Egypt in two weeks' time. The King of Saudi Arabia has expressed his condolences.

In a statement issued April 9, His Grace Bishop Angaelos, General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom lamented "the senseless and heartless brutality that can lead a person or people to indiscriminately take innocent lives, especially at the most

vulnerable hour of prayer” and prayed for the families and colleagues of “members of the security services who attempted to foil the second bombing in Alexandria lost their lives in the line of duty.”

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, “We are deeply saddened by these callous attacks on worshippers during the most important week in the Christian calendar. Our thoughts and prayers are with those who lost loved ones in these deplorable attacks, including the families and friends of the security agents, who lost their lives in the call of duty. The bombings underline once again the need for added vigilance and security during festive occasions, and we commend the additional security arrangements put in place to protect Christian communities and churches at this time. However, the bombings also highlight once again the urgent need to ensure accountability for all sectarian attacks, and justice for targeted communities throughout the country.”