

‘HOW LONG ARE WE GOING TO LIVE IN THIS INJUSTICE?’

**EGYPT’S CHRISTIANS CAUGHT BETWEEN
SECTARIAN ATTACKS AND STATE
INACTION**

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**





“Why is it when there is a problem, Christians always pay the price? What do we have to do with the events in Cairo to be punished like this?”

Coptic Christian man pointing at the ruins of the Shahid Amir Tadros Shutbi Monastery, looted and torched twice after the dispersal of pro-Morsi sit-ins in Cairo by security forces on 14 August 2013

Left: Gates blocked after an attack on Amir Tadros Monastery, Fayoum

Overleaf: Graffiti scrawled in a Coptic Christian neighbourhood in Fayoum: “They killed our brothers”

An unprecedented wave of sectarian attacks on Coptic Christians swept Egypt on 14 August 2013 as the security forces violently dispersed protest camps set-up by supporters of deposed President Mohamed Morsi in Cairo. The attacks left dozens of churches, church-affiliated buildings, schools, and charitable organizations, as well as Coptic Christian-owned businesses and other properties, damaged.

In some instances, churches and other buildings were completely torched or razed to the ground. Crosses from church tops were broken, and sanctuaries destroyed. Historical monuments with religious significance and ancient relics were engulfed by the flames. Amnesty International documented the deaths of four people during the attacks.

Pope Tawadros II, the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, the largest Coptic Christian denomination in Egypt, stated that 43 churches were completely destroyed on 14 August, with a further 207 Christian properties attacked.¹ The campaign group Maspero Youth Union documented the destruction of 37 churches across the

country, with 23 additional churches targeted for attacks and/or partially damaged. Attacks took place in Alexandria, Assiut, Beni Suef, Fayoum, Giza, Greater Cairo, Luxor, Al-Minya, North Sinai, Sohag and Suez.

Amnesty International visited sites of attacks in Al-Minya, Fayoum and Greater Cairo and spoke with eyewitnesses, religious leaders and government officials. The organization documented the deaths of four men in sectarian attacks on 14-15 August: three in Al-Minya and one in Izbet al-Nakhl in Greater Cairo.²

In all cases documented by Amnesty International, attacks took place during and in the aftermath of the forcible dispersal of the two main pro-Morsi protest camps in Greater Cairo: the sit-ins of Rabaa al-Adawiya and Nahda.³ In some incidents, attacks were carried out by passing pro-Morsi marches or by mobs of angry men armed with various weapons, including firearms, metal sticks, and knives.

Eyewitnesses told Amnesty International that the violence was also marked by the use of

sectarian and inflammatory slogans and chants, frequently preceded by incitement from local mosques and religious leaders. Graffiti sprayed on areas in the vicinity of attacks such as church walls and Coptic Christian homes, such as: “They killed our brothers during prayer”⁴ and: “[The] religion of God is Islam”, leave little doubt about the vengeful nature of the attacks against Coptic Christians, perceived as widely supporting the ousting of former President Mohamed Morsi.

Amnesty International has documented decades of attacks on Christians and other sectarian attacks, including under the rule of Hosni Mubarak, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and Mohamed Morsi.⁵

However, there has been a notable increase in sectarian tension and an unprecedented level of attacks since Minister of Defence Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced on 3 July that Mohamed Morsi was no longer President – characterized by security forces’ failure to protect Coptic Christian lives, property and places of worship.⁶

The phenomenon of sectarian attacks was particularly felt in Upper Egypt and other



Islamist strongholds, where bubbling sectarian tensions occasionally erupt onto the surface – at times for the most mundane reasons, such as altercations between neighbours. The latest sectarian attacks were marked by a rise in inflammatory sectarian discourse adopted by some members and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, blaming Coptic Christians for the ouster of Mohamed Morsi and scapegoating them for the crackdown on his supporters.

For instance, in a speech delivered from the Rabaa al-Adawiya podium on 24 July 2013, to a cheering crowd of Morsi supporters, well-known Islamist figure Asem Abdel Maged said that “churches and communists” supported the Minister of Defence, and blamed “radical *nasara* (a derogatory term for Christians)” for the killings of Muslims. He warned: “...if you want to try to stop God’s destiny... see what happens...try, Tawadros... try, Church”. While some prominent leaders within the movement publicly dissociated the Muslim Brotherhood from the violence, the main gatherings of pro-Morsi supporters such as the speakers’ podium at Rabaa al-Adawiya

provided a forum to fuel hatred against Coptic Christians in the run-up to the attacks.⁷

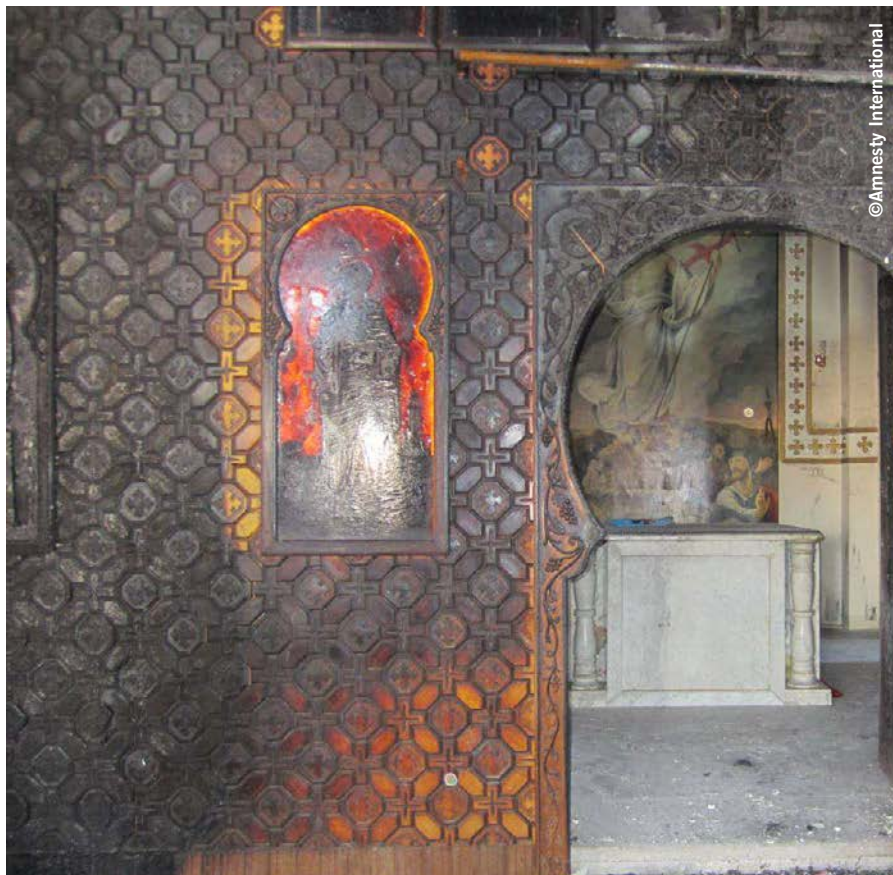
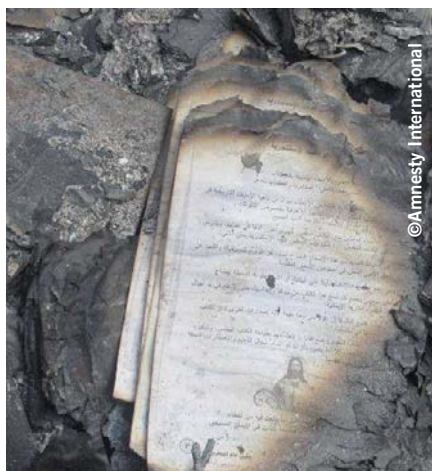
Despite the anticipated backlash against Coptic Christians and assurances by the authorities that there was a plan in place for the dispersal, the security forces failed to take necessary preventative steps to protect Coptic Christian communities and places of worship. While the security forces, including the military, were heavily deployed around government institutions ahead of the dispersals, churches were left unprotected. One resident of Al-Minya told Amnesty International that when he reached out for protection to the armed forces’ hot lines and an intelligence officer during the sectarian attacks on 14 August, he was told by both that the security forces were only ordered to protect: “vital institutions or interests”.

In fact, eyewitnesses in several governorates in Egypt told Amnesty International that those minimal forces guarding churches during normal times were withdrawn ahead of 14 August, a decision difficult to understand considering the anticipated backlash. During the attacks themselves,

the security forces failed to put an end to them, including when they spanned for hours, or recurred in subsequent days.

In some instances, churches and neighbouring police stations were attacked simultaneously or in immediate succession, as was the case in Kerdassa in Greater Cairo and in Al-Minya Governorate. For instance, officials at the Police Hospital in Agouza and the Zinhum Main Morgue told Amnesty International that 17 members of the security forces were killed in Kerdassa Police Station during a violent attack, which preceded the burning of the nearby Mallak Church.

Following the attacks, the Egyptian authorities, including the Prime Minister, were quick to condemn them and point the finger at supporters of Mohamed Morsi, as part of the government’s narrative of “fighting terrorism”. Egypt’s Minister of Defence also announced that the army would rebuild churches with its own money.⁸ On the other hand, the authorities have failed to acknowledge the discrimination faced by Coptic Christians in Egypt for decades, and the impunity enjoyed



by perpetrators of previous incidents of sectarian attacks committed under successive Egyptian governments, from Hosni Mubarak, the subsequent rule of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, to the one-year presidency of Mohamed Morsi. Officials have frequently favoured holding “reconciliation” sessions between communities over providing justice and redress, and failed to address the root causes of sectarian attacks against Coptic Christians or to repeal discriminatory provisions in Egyptian law.

The authorities must go beyond rhetoric and political score-settling to address this latest wave of attacks. Investigations into the violence must be thorough, impartial and independent, with the aim of bringing all those responsible to justice, regardless of their political affiliation. Investigations must also look into the failure of the security forces to prevent and put an end to the attacks.

The authorities must provide adequate reparation, including financial compensation, to the victims, and prioritize the rebuilding of churches. They must also address the

inherent discrimination facing Coptic Christians in Egypt and as a first and immediate step repeal laws that require official authorization for the building and restoration of churches,⁹ and address practices which result in such authorization being routinely denied.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST COPTIC CHRISTIANS

Egyptians of all faiths and denominations participated in the “25 January Revolution” and in protests on 30 June 2013 calling for the end of Mohamed Morsi’s presidency. However, religious minorities have continued to suffer discrimination by the authorities and receive inadequate protection from the state from sectarian attacks, when not targeted directly by the security forces.

Discrimination and attacks against Coptic Christians, the largest religious minority in Egypt, are particularly prevalent. Today, Copts continue to be under-represented in relation to appointments to high public offices, positions of university presidents, as well as key security positions, for instance at the level of the National Security Agency or

the General Intelligence. In August 2013, the government only appointed four Christians to the 50-member committee mandated to prepare a Constitution.

Egypt has for decades witnessed sectarian clashes that varied in intensity but were mostly rooted in religious stereotyping and inequalities, in some cases perpetuated by state actors. Coptic Christians in Egypt have repeatedly complained that the Egyptian authorities have not done enough to protect them or prosecute their attackers. The authorities have often favoured “reconciliation” over the prosecution of offenders.

Under Hosni Mubarak, at least 15 major attacks on Copts were documented. On 6 January 2010, six Coptic Christians and a Muslim police guard were killed in a drive-by shooting as worshippers left a church in the city of Nagaa Hammadi. On 1 January 2011, a bomb attack on a Coptic Christian Church in Alexandria killed over 20 people.

The situation didn’t improve under the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, the military body which ruled the country



Left, overleaf: Burned papers, Amir Tados, Al-Minya

Right, overleaf: Burned icons, Shahid Amir Tados Monastery, Fayoum

Left: Amir Tados Church, Al-Minya

between the downfall of Hosni Mubarak and the election of President Mohamed Morsi. On 8 March 2011, clashes between Muslims and Coptic Christians at the Al-Muqattam Hill, east Cairo, left 10 dead. On 9 October 2011, soldiers killed 27 protesters around the state television building, Maspero. All but one were Coptic Christians. Investigations into the violence were marred by irregularities and the findings have yet to be made public.¹⁰ Only three soldiers were charged and convicted to prison terms ranging from two to three years for “manslaughter”.

The situation also didn't improve under Mohamed Morsi. In 2013, under the last months of Mohamed Morsi's administration, amid a rise of sectarian rhetoric by members and allies of the Muslim Brotherhood, Coptic Christian activists reported at least six attacks on churches or affiliated buildings, in the Governorates of Aswan, Beni Suef, Cairo, and Fayoum. No adequate investigations were conducted, no measures put in place to avoid further violence, and nobody was punished.

This pattern of inaction is not only a failure of the Egyptian authorities and a breach of their international obligations but it also contributes to the sense of injustice, discrimination and vulnerability felt by Christians in Egypt, and leads perpetrators to believe that they can carry on attacking Christians and get away with it.

These failures violate Egypt's obligations under international human rights law to ensure the right to bodily integrity and to effectively protect members of minorities from abuses, and to bring perpetrators to justice.

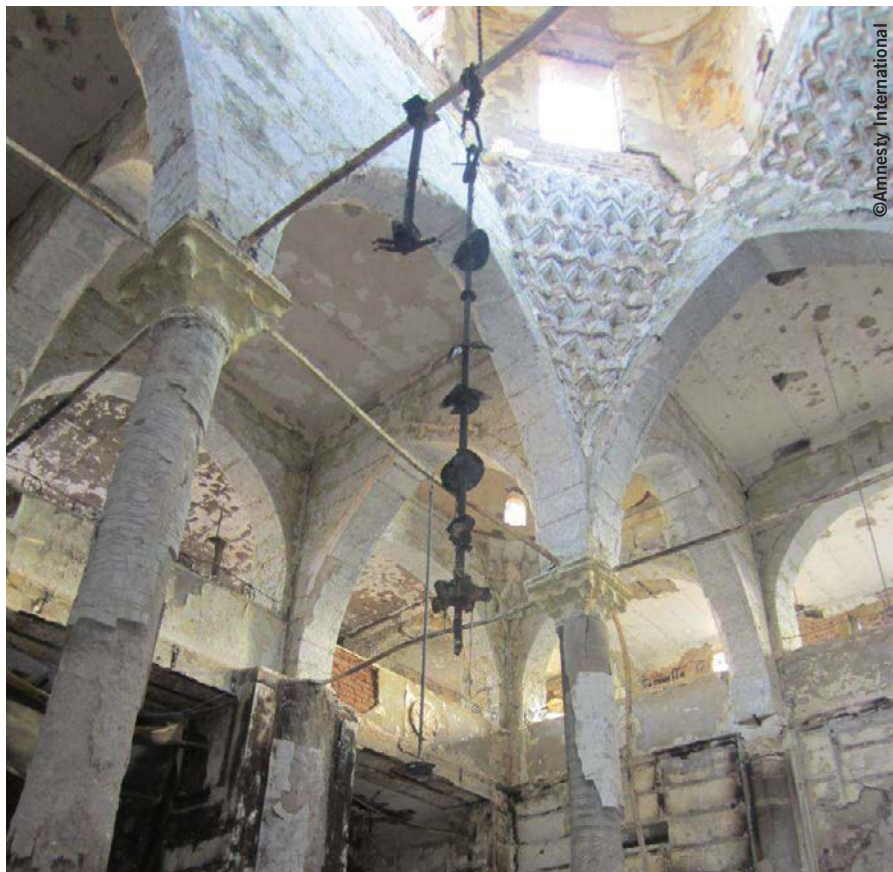
In breach of Articles 2, 18 and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which prohibit discrimination and guarantee freedom of thought, conscience and religion and equality before the law, the authorities have failed to end discriminatory practices preventing Coptic Christians from building houses of worship or restoring existing ones. Many churches have been closed down or destroyed because the authorities allege they did not get the right permission to be built or renewed.

Other religious minorities also face discrimination in Egypt, including Shi'a and Bahá'ís.

AL-MINYA

The Al-Minya Governorate in Upper Egypt, about 250 kilometres south of Cairo, has witnessed the most sectarian attacks, taking place in Al-Minya City, as well as a number of surrounding towns and villages, including Dir Mawas, Malawi, Beni Mazar, Abu Qurqas, and Samalout. Churches of all Christian denominations, including Coptic Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical, were attacked.

Attacks on churches were taking place against the backdrop of political violence, and clashes between some supporters of Mohamed Morsi and security forces. According to mortuary statistics, 53 people died across the Governorate on 14 August in connection to the violence, most in clashes with security forces. Authorities moved to disperse a pro-Morsi sit-in in the centre of the Governorate's capital, while churches and at least six major police stations were stormed simultaneously. In at least one



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centre – Adwa – the police station was attacked, while churches were spared, reportedly due to the intervention of Muslim neighbours.

Several local residents and religious leaders told Amnesty International that, throughout the day of 14 August, they approached the authorities for protection in vain. The Head of the Security Directorate in Al-Minya, Abdelaziz Qura, told Amnesty International that on 14 August supporters of the deposed President, some heavily armed with automatic rifles, stormed and burned six main police stations across the governorates, namely Maghagha, Beni Mazar, Matai, Abou Qurqas, Samalout, and Adwa, as well as smaller police points in surrounding villages. Fourteen security personnel were killed during the violence, he claimed.

Abdelaziz Qura explained the security forces' failure to put an end to sectarian attacks by the simultaneous nature of attacks on police stations, courts, other government buildings and churches. He pointed to the large number of heavily armed assailants overwhelming the security forces. When asked whether reinforcements

were requested from the capital in anticipation of the likely rise in attacks on Coptic Christians, he pointed to additional armoured vehicles provided by the armed forces.

He told Amnesty International that the Prosecution has started investigations into the violence on 14 August, and that the evidence-gathering process was underway by the police. By 25 August, 10 people had been arrested in connection with church looting and burning, while another 43 people were arrested on accusations of other violent acts committed on 14 August.

Some local residents and lawyers in Al-Minya raised concerns about the impartiality of the investigations into the violence, expressing fears that the process aimed at political score-settling against supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, rather than accountability for the real culprits. Among those arrested in connection to the violence is lawyer **Taha Hassan Ibrahim Hassanin**, born in 1962, known for his opposition to the removal of Mohamed Morsi. His relatives first saw him on 9 September, over three weeks after his arrest on 16 August. He was

brought to the Prosecution without the presence of a lawyer, and is apparently facing charges of "inciting sectarian strife", "spreading rumours endangering national security" and "forming an armed group".

AL-MINYA CITY

On the morning of 14 August, the pro-Morsi sit-in in Al-Minya City, held at the Palace Square, was dispersed by security forces. Journalist **Zeinab Ismail**, who observed the violence from 9am to 6pm, told Amnesty International that security forces, including riot police, fired teargas and live ammunition at protesters. She continued:

"After the dispersal, churches started to burn down, and people were stealing and rampaging... Walking on Hussein Street [a commercial street], I overheard some people saying: 'Don't steal, just burn' ... People were carrying weapons like swords and machetes... It was difficult to understand who was who... There were also thugs involved, stealing from Coptic stores... They saw me filming, hit me, took my camera and threatened to kill me."



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**Left, overleaf and left: Amir Tadros Church,
Al-Minya**

Below: Damaged shop, Hussein Street



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From her testimony, it appears that while supporters of Mohamed Morsi led the attacks on churches, Al-Minya residents – with no clear political or sectarian motivation – used the opportunity to loot and steal valuables from churches and Coptic Christian-owned property.

Bishop Makarius of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Al-Minya argued that for him the main tragedy was not the burning of churches, but rather the entrenched attitudes leading to people celebrating such damage, and exploiting the chaos. He told Amnesty International that he noticed a clear rise in the use of sectarian rhetoric in Al-Minya during the one-year rule of Mohamed Morsi. He viewed the burning of churches as part of a pre-conceived plan to attack Coptic Christians once the pro-Morsi sit-ins were dispersed, facilitated by the absence of security forces, who were themselves under attack. He said that whilst attacks were happening, religious leaders called all relevant security officials at the governorate level, as well as the armed forces, for help that did not arrive.

On 14 August, in Al-Minya City alone, three churches, church-affiliated institutions such as an orphanage, the Young Man's Christian Association and other community centres were stormed and torched, as well as Christian-owned businesses. At least one other church was also targeted.

In the Abu Hilal area, home to the Rahman and Abu Bakr Mosques, which, according to local residents, espouse teachings of Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Group), the Anba ("Father") Moussa Church, which opened its doors in July 2011, was attacked three times during the course of the day. Warnings of trouble ahead came in the morning from the loudspeakers of the Rahman Mosque, after praising God's name: "They are killing our brothers in Rabaa [al-Adawiya]" and: "Praise to jihad". Church-goers and church employees told Amnesty International that, upon hearing the calls, the priest advised the congregation praying at the church between 6 and 8am to leave.

At first, a Molotov cocktail was thrown inside the fence of the church at about noon, whilst religious leaders called for police intervention. They were reportedly told that

security was overstretched given attacks on police stations and government buildings. Those inside the church managed to extinguish the initial fire.

According to eyewitnesses, at about 3pm, the church was attacked from two directions by a larger group of men, some of them armed with shotguns. Those inside managed to ward off the attack. The final, and most damaging attempt, took place at around 9pm. By that time, a mob of some 300 men had gathered and they then broke through the metal gate of the church. People who had remained inside the church grounds were overwhelmed and escaped through the other entrance. One man was hit in the face by the assailants. Another was captured and questioned for about an hour before being let go, after being slapped several times and given a lecture. During questioning, he was reportedly reprimanded for the role the Orthodox Church, and its patriarch Pope Tawadros II, played in supporting the ousting of Mohamed Morsi. He was also subjected to derogatory comments about the cross tattooed on his hand (a common practice among Coptic Christians).



After breaking into the church, the adjacent service building and the residence of one of the priests, the assailants looted all the valuables they were able to carry, including air-conditioners, fans, chairs, and benches. According to residents, vehicles came and loaded the stolen items. After the theft was completed, the assailants set the place on fire and left. The priest's car, parked outside the church, was also set alight. An eyewitness told Amnesty International:

"There were warnings before. There are people in this neighbourhood who really hate Christians. One guy was distributing gas [to set the place on fire] to the attackers... but nothing was done to prevent this."

According to church workers, on the morning of the attack, the three Ministry of Interior guards who normally protected the church withdrew.

Angry mobs also attacked the Amir Tadros Church, built around 1920. According to eyewitnesses, five men were inside at the time of the attack. At about 12.30am, Molotov cocktails, rocks and broken glass

were thrown inside. The attack progressed when the assailants, shouting "Islamic, Islamic" and "God is Great", managed to break through the metal gate of the church. One eyewitness continued:

"They were making some really offensive comments including that 'Christian dogs have no place in Egypt'... even though they had finished off the schools and orphanage [down the street], we thought that they would spare the church... we barely escaped, jumping onto roofs of adjacent buildings, and hiding in homes of some Christian families... Youths tried to put the fire out, but were attacked, and chased away... Everything is ruined or stolen... a firefighting vehicle came much later, but it had no more gas [extinguishing liquid]."

Another witness told Amnesty International that once he arrived at the church at around 11am, he felt lingering tear gas in the air following the dispersal of a pro-Morsi sit-in at Palace Square. He continued:

"After the dispersal, some protesters also attempted to storm the nearby Al-Minya Security Directorate – failing that, they went

on a rampage of Christian institutions and stores in the area. The security [forces] did not intervene."

An Evangelical church – locally known as "3rd" – catering for about 90 local families according to its priest – was also attacked and set ablaze on 14 August. Local residents told Amnesty International that at about 9am, they heard shouts: "Get down Muslims, your brothers are being killed [in Rabaa al-Adawiya]". Shortly after, about 10 people armed with automatic rifles came to the church, located in a residential street. In addition to setting the church hall on fire, the assailants also damaged classrooms upstairs, including a computer room and a library. Nobody was present inside the church during the attack, and all Christians living nearby kept indoors in fear of reprisals. As in other attacks, no security forces were to be seen.

Several church-affiliated and other Christian institutions were targeted in the attacks. The Jesuit and Brothers Association in Al-Minya City, which had been registered under the Ministry of Insurance and Social Affairs since 1966, was ransacked and burned.



Left, overleaf: Room in the Mermaid boat-restaurant in which two men died

Right, overleaf: Damage in the Evangelical "3rd" Church, Al-Minya

Left: The burned library of the Jesuit Association in Al-Minya

The association is inside a complex which also hosts a school, a 125-year-old monastery and a service centre. At about 10am, there was an attempt to break into the complex through the main door. At about 2.30pm, a group of men successfully entered through the back door. Apparently, a group of about five assailants managed to jump the fence, opening the door for the remainder. The attackers ordered those present out, including at least three men with disabilities who were working at the community centre's workshop, set-up to empower people with disabilities to be economically self-reliant. The three men managed to leave unharmed, but the assailants burned a wheelchair belonging to one of the men.

The attackers then ransacked the service building, stealing valuables, breaking classrooms, burning some library books and the association's records. When Amnesty International examined the centre, it could still see bullet holes on the doors – at the main gate and also inside the complex. According to a witness, the assailants were armed with knives and other such weapons, as well as shotguns. As in other documented

cases, religious leaders and staff called security to intervene and went to the nearby Al-Minya Police Station three times, all in vain.

On 24 August, an employee from Criminal Investigations came to assess the damage.

A number of Christian-owned businesses were also attacked on 14 August including stores on Hussein Street such as Roxy, as well as two boat-restaurants on the Nile, the Mermaid and al-Dabiya. Two men died inside the Mermaid, after they hid inside a toilet on the boat, which the assailants set ablaze.

The owner of the boat-restaurant, Samuel Subeit, told Amnesty International that one of his employees, **Galaa Ahmed Ali**, commonly known as Ihab, called him at about 10am, in a panic reporting that a group of some 100 men armed with various weapons including automatic rifles were approaching. At that stage, the owner called Rescue and City Protection, but suspected that little could be done because pro-Morsi protesters blocked the main road leading to the restaurants on the Nile.

At about 10.30am, he got another desperate message from his employee: "*We cannot get out and don't know what to do*". A third employee managed to jump off the boat and swim to safety, while Galaa Ahmed Ali and **Bishoy Mikhael** perished. Samuel lodged a complaint with the Al-Minya Police Station (No: 7342/2013). There were no casualties at the al-Dabiya boat-restaurant, where assailants allowed staff to exit before torching the place.

On a busy commercial street in the centre of Al-Minya, Amnesty International saw store shutters marked with "X" signs. Local residents and store owners told Amnesty International that red and black "Xs", respectively, indicated Muslim and Christian ownership. Several stores, marked with black "Xs" were looted and damaged on 14 August, including the Amir Store for Household Goods.

Owners told Amnesty International that the attack began at about 1.30pm, lasting for several hours. They said that in the three weeks leading up to the violence, they saw flyers urging retribution against police stations and churches, should the pro-Morsi



sit-ins be dispersed. Amnesty International was not able to obtain copies of flyers to verify the claims. At the time of the organization's visit on 24 August, no members of the police or Prosecution had visited the site to assess the damage.

DELGA AND OTHER VILLAGES AND TOWNS IN AL-MINYA

Immediately following the announcement by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi that Mohamed Morsi was ousted, the first wave of attacks against Coptic Christians erupted in the village of Delga, in the centre of Dir Mawas. According to local residents, this populous village of some 120,000 inhabitants has a significant Christian minority, composed of several denominations such as Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical. It is also known as a stronghold of hardline Islamists who, according to local residents, have been inciting hatred against Coptic Christians including through mosque sermons and loudspeakers and the distribution of flyers since 28 June.

The service building of the Catholic Mar Girgis Church, dating from the 4th Century, was the first to come under attack on 3 July. According to its priest, Father **Ayoub Youssef**, who was hiding inside, after Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's announcement, dozens of men broke into the church grounds screaming: "Islamic despite the noses of the *nasara*", "Tawadros, the Caliphate is coming, coming," and "We will bring the cross down".

The six guards fled when the attack started. The assailants rampaged through the building, stealing belongings such as computers, and damaging the library and classrooms. Father Ayoub Youssef's apartment was also looted. Before leaving, the attackers set the place ablaze. Father Ayoub Youssef called the police and armed forces in vain, while assailants continued to intimidate Christian residents and attack surrounding houses and businesses. According to the information available to Amnesty International, a Christian woman was shot in the knee during a violent attack on her home. Her husband, **Nadi Mehani**, reportedly tried to ward-off the attack by shooting at the assailants. He was eventually

arrested by the security forces who arrived hours later. He was released two weeks later on bail, and is facing charges of possessing an unauthorized weapon. The other suspects who were arrested, including some 55 Muslim men, escaped when the Dir Mawas Police Station and Prosecution Office were stormed and burned on 14 August.

On 14 August, attacks were repeated on a larger scale, targeting churches of several denominations, and more Christian properties and homes. The small police point in the village was also attacked, and pleas for reinforcements were not met. For instance, the Virgin Mary and Father Abram monastery complex was set ablaze. Part of the complex contained a church dating back to the 4th Century.

Coptic Christian, **Iskandar Tous**, 60, was shot dead inside his home, his body disfigured and dragged in the streets by a tractor. After his body was buried, it was dug out of the grave twice. His cousin, lawyer **Samir Lamee Saqr**, who sustained shotgun-pellet wounds in the attack, told Amnesty International how the events unfolded:



Left, overleaf: A damaged door at the Jesuit Association

Left: Graffiti condemning a "military coup", scrawled in Al-Minya

"On the morning of 14 August, I was woken up by a call from a friend who said: 'The pro-Morsi sit-ins are being dispersed in Cairo, be careful'... shortly after, I could hear from the loudspeakers of the nearby Ibad al Rahman Mosque: 'Honourable Delga residents, your brothers in Rabaa [al-Adawiya] and Nahda are being killed by the infidel nasara and the police and army. Everyone who has weapons, get out and don't leave a nasari or a government institution standing'...

"At about 9am, stones were thrown at our homes – the only two Christian homes on the street – and electricity at home was cut. Muslim neighbours later told me that the attackers tampered with the electric cables outside... by 10am, the crowd got bigger, there were about 2,000 [men], and they were armed and firing at our houses...

"I was trying to escape with my family, my wife, my baby twins, and my mother; using a ladder we climbed to a neighbour's house, and then to another... I received several shotgun pellet wounds, and my mother was hit with pellets just below her eye... My cousin was not as lucky... He was in the

house with his wife, and daughter-in-law. His daughter-in-law managed to escape. His wife saw him shot and killed, and only got out alive because some other Muslim intervened to get her to safety."

The crowd then looted the houses, Samir Lamee Saqr's law office, and Iskandar Tous' hairdresser's before setting them alight.

At the time of writing, the family had yet to receive a death certificate, and no exhumation of the body had been conducted. They had lodged complaints with the Public Prosecution several times on 21 and 22 August, and again on 5 September, calling for investigations and for the body to be autopsied. They also submitted a separate complaint to the Ministry of Interior on 5 September.

Following the violence, some Christian residents of Delga fled, while others continued to live in fear and under siege, minimizing their movement outside their homes. Some residents extracted money from their Christian neighbours for "protection", ranging from 500 to 8,000 Egyptian pounds (US\$72-1,160). One

Christian man, kidnapped for ransom, was only released after his family reportedly paid 180,000 Egyptian pounds (US\$2,610). Following several unsuccessful attempts, security forces including members of the armed forces, entered the village and took control on 16 September, arresting a number of suspects.

The town of Bani Mazar, north of Al-Minya City, also witnessed sectarian attacks on 14 August, leading to the torching of two churches and minor theft from and damage to a third. Local residents told Amnesty International that at about 12am, an angry mob reached the street of the Evangelical Baptist Church. The attackers broke into the church and set it on fire, burning the library and the prayer hall. The Ma'madaniya Church was also attacked at about 12.30pm by a group of men, some of them covering their faces. An eyewitness told Amnesty International that after the dispersals in Cairo he heard calls on a loudspeakers: "Praise to jihad" and "God is Great" before the attack started. The assailants carried knives, swords and Molotov cocktails.

Right: Damage in the "old" Virgin Mary Church, Fayoum

Right, overleaf: The "new" Virgin Mary Church, Fayoum



Like elsewhere in Al-Minya, the security forces did not intervene to stop the violence. A worshipper said: *"The police were only protecting themselves from attack, nobody bothered about us."*

FAYOUM

On 14 August, a number of churches were attacked in the Governorate of Fayoum – another Islamist stronghold, about 90 kilometres south of Cairo. In the Youssef al-Sadik and nearby Ibshway centres, attackers spent 14 August looting and destroying two churches and a monastery. Church workers, residents, and religious leaders told Amnesty International that they repeatedly called officials from the Ministry of Interior, local police stations, and the army's hot lines in a desperate attempt to protect the churches, but help did not arrive. They were told that a firefighter vehicle sent to limit the damage was prevented from entering the village by the assailants blocking the road. Officials said the nearby police station in Ibshway was itself under attack, and they were unable to intervene. Reinforcements were not sent from Cairo despite its proximity to Fayoum.

Nazla residents told Amnesty International that in the morning they woke up to announcements over the loudspeakers of several local mosques denouncing the killings of "our brothers", in reference to the violent dispersals of the pro-Morsi sit-ins in Cairo. Shortly after, groups of angry Nazla villagers congregated by the transport rank and mosques in the north of the village. It appears that they were joined by people from surrounding villages as well.

After being under construction for 13 years, the Orthodox Athra (Virgin) Church opened its doors just two months before being destroyed on 14 August.

Eyewitnesses told Amnesty International that the attack was preceded by calls from the nearby Mohamed Mosque loudspeaker, including: "Islam is being killed in Rabaa [al-Adawiya]". One eyewitness, present inside the church on the morning of 14 August, told Amnesty International that the three low-ranking members of the Ministry of Interior and the "informant" (*mukhbir*),¹¹ who normally guard the church, fled prior to the anticipated attack.

The assailants carried metal sticks, swords, fireworks, and revolvers and ordered all those present out. Any sign of resistance was met with death threats and beatings using sticks, rocks, and punches. A man who rushed to the church upon hearing it was under attack was stabbed and insulted. He explained:

"They were shouting: 'you nasara, you dogs. You elected Shafiq,¹² you support Sisi...'

They also said that as Christians we have no religion... they had gas canisters with them, and locally made explosives, the village here is known for making fireworks... They stole what they could, the rest they just broke, later setting the place on fire... They did not leave anything unharmed... the church itself, the service building, the hall used for weddings and funerals, the kindergarten... they even broke the toilets... they burned the clothes we collect for poor people, and took the money out of donation boxes."

They also climbed up and broke the cross adorning the top of the church. The attack continued intermittently throughout the day, with assailants first stealing valuable items such as computers, fans and charitable



donations, breaking other items including church chairs and benches, and eventually setting the church on fire.

When Amnesty International visited the site on 21 August, it examined graffiti such as “There is no God but Allah”, the “Religion of God is Islam”, “Fuck Christians” and “God is Great” written on the walls.

Another church with the same name, Athra (“Virgin”), locally known as the “old” church, was also destroyed on 14 August. Amnesty International visited the site on 21 August, examining the collapsed roof and charred remains of the church. According to local residents, the church, constructed in 1932, contained a historical icon, which was either destroyed in the fire or looted. Assaultants also stormed the house of **Nabil Awadala**, a local co-ordinator of the Tamarud Campaign,¹³ adjacent to the church.

His wife, present at the time of the attack, told Amnesty International that at about 10am she was woken up by shouts of “Islamic, Islamic”, and a mob breaking through her front door. She continued:

“It was a big mob, of men and youth... It was difficult to count their numbers... They were carrying sticks, including metal ones... and just entered inside. They threw the fridge on the floor, and broke the bathroom sink... got inside the bedroom [and] took some things, like a mobile. They slapped my sister-in-law who tried to protect my husband from attack... they insulted us saying that we were ‘infidels’ and used other really bad words I can’t repeat... they also attacked the church.”

Awadala lodged a complaint at the Fayoum Public Prosecution Office.

The “old” church is located in a predominantly Coptic Christian part of the village. Graffiti was sprayed on house walls, including slogans frequently used at pro-Morsi demonstrations: “We will defend legitimacy with blood”, and: “Leave, Sisi, Morsi is my President”. Other graffiti like “They killed our brothers during prayer”, in reference to supporters of Mohamed Morsi killed shortly after dawn prayer on 8 July in front of the Republican Guard Club, seen next to the ruins of the church, strongly indicates that Coptic Christians were

targeted in reprisal for their perceived support of the removal of Mohamed Morsi, and for subsequent violations suffered by his supporters.

The Amir Tadros Shutbi Monastery, sitting on top of a hill on the main road leading to Nazla Village, was also attacked. According to information available to Amnesty International, those inside the monastery expected the attack when they heard about churches in Nazla Village being targeted. They closed the metal gate and other entrances to the monastery, and held their breath.

According to an eyewitness, a mob of some 500 men armed with sticks and knives, and carrying homemade explosive devices and gas, approached the gate shouting “God is great” at about 10am. They ordered those inside to leave, and beat those who dared to resist. A guard from the Ministry of Interior, who unlike his colleagues decided to stay behind and attempt to protect the monastery, was dragged outside by the mob, his weapon and walkie-talkie were confiscated, and he was beaten. Some local residents intervened to get him and others inside the



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church to safety. According to information available to Amnesty International, two people needed medical attention following the attack. An eyewitness told Amnesty international:

"They stole everything they could carry. What they could not steal they broke, and eventually torched the place. The attack was going on intermittently from 10 in the morning until after it got dark. They set a bus, cars and 'tok toks' [three-wheel vehicles used in narrow roads] inside the monastery on fire.

"They even ripped out electricity cables, stripped the walls and took out water pipes and water taps... It's like they just wanted to completely destroy the place... They were saying things like 'We want to defend Islam', and shouting 'God is great'... In recent weeks, there were pro-Morsi marches passing near here, but there were no attacks before."

Another historical monastery, the Shahid Amir Tados Shutbi, was destroyed in the village of Dissia, some 30 kilometres away. It was attacked twice – first on 15 August, and

again on the following day. According to local residents and church workers, on 15 August, two cars pulled up by the gates at about 3pm. Armed men, some of them in balaclavas, others with their faces visible sporting beards, disembarked. They opened fire including with automatic rifles, but luckily those inside the monastery managed to escape largely unharmed. An eyewitness continued:

"After they finished, we came back to try to salvage what could be salvaged, and clean up. The firefighters only came the next day... Then after they left, on Friday at about 3.30, we saw smoke coming out of the monastery again, turns out they [the attackers] returned to finish off the job... they left us a charred place, and some Molotov cocktails..."

"So far the Prosecution did not come to view the damage, but we lodged an official complaint... Our Father [the religious leader] called the government so many times in the [last] two days, but nothing".

Employees at the church told Amnesty International that they had been waiting for

authorization from the Governor for years to be able to build a fence around the monastery to provide better protection. They never got a positive answer, and now there is not much left to protect. One said:

"There is a fight between the army and the Muslim Brothers. What do churches have to do with it? ... How long are we going to live in this injustice?"

Above, left: Graffiti scrawled next to the "new" Virgin Mary Church: "We will defend Legitimacy with our blood"

Above, right: Anba Moussa Church, Al-Minya
Overleaf: Graffiti scrawled next to the "new" Virgin Mary Church: "God is great"

Front cover and back page: The monastery of Amir Tados Shutbi



"I firmly condemn the attacks against the cultural institutions of the country and the looting of its cultural property... This constitutes irreversible damage to the history and identity of the Egyptian people."

Irina Bokavo, the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, in reference to the looting and destruction of churches across Egypt and a museum in Al-Minya Governorate

ENDNOTES

¹ *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, "Pope Tawadros to a congressional delegation 'the burning of churches is the price to build democracy, paid with love'", 5 September 2013: bit.ly/13kFpZX

² For additional details on sectarian attacks in Isbat al-Nakhl see Amnesty International, "Government must protect Coptic Christians from sectarian violence", 20 August 2013: bit.ly/163oK9P

³ See: Amnesty International, *Egypt: 'People were dying all around me': Testimonies from Cairo violence on 14 August 2016*, 16 August 2013: bit.ly/14ZRuqC

⁴ Most likely, in reference to the killing of at least 51 pro-Morsi protesters on 8 July in front of the Republican Guard Club, shortly after dawn prayers.

⁵ See, for example, Amnesty International, "Egypt's Coptic Christians must be protected from sectarian violence", 27 March 2013: bit.ly/13xfUq8; or "Egyptian army must answer for deadly toll at Coptic protests", 11 October 2011: bit.ly/p2x0bP; or "Egypt: Egyptian authorities failing to protect religious minorities", 12 January 2010: bit.ly/7jO7Qr

⁶ See Amnesty international, *Egypt: 'There is no door on which I did not knock': Coptic Christians caught in attacks and state's failures*, 23 July 2013: bit.ly/19fV2FJ. During the televised announcement, Pope Tawadros II;

the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Mohamed al-Tayeb; and a number of political leaders were present – pointing to wide support for the ousting among all sectors of the Egyptian population.

⁷ For Asem Abdel Maged's speech on 24 July see YouTube: bit.ly/14cL1Cw

In a speech at the same venue the following day, Muslim Brotherhood leading member Mohamed Beltagy called specifically on Christians not to respond to the call by the Minister of Defence to go to the streets on 26 June to "mandate" the army to "fight terrorism". See YouTube: bit.ly/1f4Z4Dx

Other examples on the use of inflammatory sectarian language in Rabaa al-Adawiya can be found on YouTube at: bit.ly/16JKX4a; and bit.ly/19YTSdI. For official condemnation by the Muslim Brotherhood of attacks on places of worship, along with a denial of any responsibility, see examples: Ikhwan Online, "Muslim Brotherhood Statement on Putschist Schemes of Vandalism and Sectarian Strife, 17 August 2013": bit.ly/14JBphI; and Ikhwan Online, "MB statement on attacks on the town of Delga by military junta", 16 September 2013: bit.ly/176tjBS

⁸ See for instance, *Mada Masr*, "Sisi: military to restore mosque, churches damaged in Wednesday violence", 15 August: bit.ly/1bAvD8a

⁹ Decree 391 of 2005, requiring Governors' authorization for the restoration or expansion of

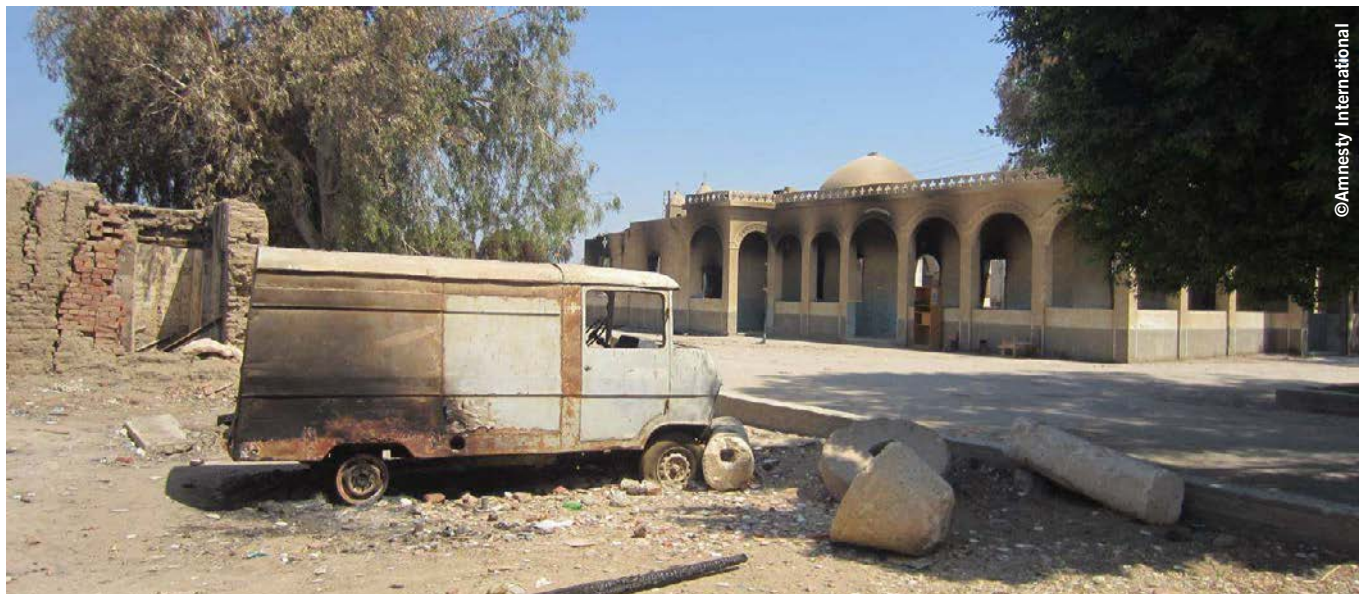
churches, was suspended in February 2013 by an administrative court following a lawsuit brought by Coptic Christian lawyer Mamdouh Nouh, but has yet to be implemented. In practice, the court's decision has changed little, and obstacles remain for the renovation of churches. The building of new churches is still governed by decrees dating from the Ottoman period; in practice requiring presidential decrees.

¹⁰ See Amnesty International, *Brutality unpunished and unchecked: Egypt's military kill and torture protesters with impunity*, 2 October 2012: bit.ly/SyBPlm

¹¹ An employee at police stations, dressed in civilian clothes, who reports to the Head of Investigations (*rais al-mabaheth*). The role involves providing information on detainees and local residents.

¹² Ahmed Shafiq was the candidate competing in the second round of presidential elections against Mohamed Morsi in June 2012.

¹³ In the run-up to the 30 June 2013 protests, the group launched a petition calling for early presidential elections. It claimed to have collected over 20 million across the country.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International calls on the Egyptian authorities to:

- Conduct full, impartial and independent investigations into all sectarian attacks committed since Mohamed Morsi was deposed on 3 July, including those committed on or in the immediate aftermath of the dispersal of pro-Morsi sit-ins on 14 August. Bring individuals found responsible for killings and other serious human rights abuses to justice in proceedings meeting international standards for fair trial and without possibility of the death penalty, in line with the UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions;
- Ensure that investigations examine the role of the security forces in failing to stop the violence and hold security officials accountable;
- Prioritize the building and restoration of places of worship destroyed or partially damaged during the sectarian attacks.

- Formally repeal Presidential Decree 391/2005 requiring governors' authorization for the restoration of churches and all other discriminatory provisions governing the building of churches, including the Ottoman Decrees;
- Take immediate measures to improve security for Coptic Christians and other minorities, including consultations with minority communities to identify appropriate measures;
- Ensure victims and their families receive full reparations, including but not limited to financial compensation; and ensure families who fled due to fear of reprisals are able to return to their homes in safety;
- Ensure that all eyewitnesses are protected from threats or intimidation;
- Change all laws and practices that discriminate against Christians and other religious minorities to ensure that they conform to Articles 2, 18 and 26 of the ICCPR, which prohibit discrimination and guarantee freedom of thought,

conscience and religion and equality before the law;

- Devise and implement, in meaningful consultation with religious institutions and independent human rights and minority rights activists, a strategy to address inherent discrimination and stereotyping of religious minorities;
- Ensure security forces and members of the judiciary receive training in human rights and non-discrimination to effectively prevent attacks, respond speedily and effectively to stop attacks that are occurring, and bring perpetrators to justice in fair proceedings without imposition of the death penalty;
- Facilitate the outstanding visits of the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

**AMNESTY
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