

New Wave of Violence Erupts in Egypt

After several violent incidents impacting Christians and their property in February—a priest was murdered, several monasteries attacked and a demolition order issued for a five-story church property—Middle East Concern is reporting new incidents in March.

On March 4, a large mob attacked Christian homes and a church building in Souf, Helwan governorate in south Cairo. Several homes were damaged and the Church of St. Mina and St. George was set ablaze. The mob prevented the fire brigade attending the fire, and consequently the building was badly damaged.

An army unit was stationed nearby but initially declined to attend, and when they did respond they stopped when local Muslims assured them that all had become calm. A curfew was imposed on Christians in the surrounding area, affecting 12,000 people. Several church members were initially reported to be trapped within the church building. However, it subsequently became clear that they had escaped safely via the church's roof.

It is understood that the incident followed reports of a relationship between a Christian man and a Muslim woman. A reconciliation meeting was held between the two communities, agreeing that the man would leave the area as his home had already been burnt down. The lady's father was attacked by his cousin because he did not sanction the honor-killing of his daughter. The father and cousin both died. The Christian community was then blamed for the deaths of the two men.

On Monday, March 8, there was a protest about this incident in central Cairo, attended by Christians and sympathetic Muslims. The newly appointed Prime Minister, Essam Sharaf, attended.

Christians have called for the governor of Helwan to be sacked.

Elsewhere in Cairo, a sectarian clash erupted in the Moqattam area after a large number of Christians staged a protest demanding justice for the Souf attack. Rocks and Molotov cocktails were thrown. The army intervened to restore order. The army intervened to restore order. The Health Ministry reports that 10 people (including Christians and Muslims) were killed and at least 100 injured.

The recent protest movement brought together Egyptians from Muslim and Christian communities, in an unprecedented show of unity which has been widely welcomed. However, these latest incidents indicate that little has changed for many Egyptian Christians.

Egyptian Christians request our prayers that:

- a. The wounded and traumatized in Souf, Moqattam and the previous incidents will know the healing touch of Jesus
 - b. Christians in Souf, and throughout Egypt, will be able to meet freely for worship, prayer and fellowship
 - c. Church leaders will know the Spirit's guidance at this time
 - d. Christians will be active in expressing their faith in loving ways
 - e. All officials involved will love mercy, act justly, learn about Jesus and choose to follow Him
 - f. The current process of political change will bring about greater freedoms for all Egyptians including the Christians
- a