

Angry Mob Destroys Church Amid Chronic Persecution in Egypt

A building in a village southwest of Cairo housing a reception hall and nursery was destroyed yesterday by a mob following a rumor that it was a church.

According to *Watani Newspaper*, around 5,000 **Islamist extremists** armed with hammers, axes and old electricity poles descended on the building in Fanous Village in Tamia District and razed the structure to the ground.

The building was owned by a **Coptic** society affiliated to Mar-Girgis (St. George's) Church and had been erected on land donated to the church by a Coptic villager. Construction began two months ago, after all official permissions had been secured. The first floor had been completed and the second floor was under construction when the attack occurred.

According to Coptic villagers, the violence was preceded by calls from local mosques to defend Muslims against Christians who were building a church. The attack is said to have occurred despite an earlier meeting between the village mayor and Muslim and Christian elders, at which it was agreed that only the second floor of the building would be demolished.

Security services arrived after the social services building had already been demolished. A report was filed with the police by local Copts, accompanied by priests from St. George's Church, but so far no one has been arrested. Coptic residents in Fanous village are reportedly staying indoors for fear of further attacks on their homes and businesses.

A representative of the Maspero Coptic Youth Organization told the Assyrian International News Agency (AINA) that the Coptic Church had warned the security services of the possibility of orchestrated sectarian violence in Tamia District and neighboring areas, which are home to a large Islamist population.

Andrew Johnston, advocacy director at Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) said: "The incident in Fanous Village follows a chronic pattern of injustice that has contributed to the emergence of a culture of impunity with regards to sectarian violence. Once again a falsehood has been used to stoke religious sentiment, resulting in wanton destruction that the security services have failed to prevent. The Egyptian government is seeking to restore international confidence in the nation and improve its image amongst investors. However, in order to progress and be respected as a thriving state with a dependable government, it is vital for Egypt to ensure the security, equality and fundamental freedoms of all of its citizens."