

Christian Girls Being Snatched by Islamist Traffickers

The recent upheaval in Egypt once again brings to the forefront the plight of the country's Christians who have come under increased attack from Islamists since the ouster of President Mohammed Morsi.

Now they're hoping and praying Egypt's next government will do a better job of protecting them from attacks and the trafficking of Christian girls.

Funerals like the recent one at St. Mina Church in North Sinai have become all too familiar for Egyptian Christians. Friends and family recently paid final respects to Father Mina Aboud, a beloved Coptic priest. Islamist gunmen opened fire on Mina July 6 while he drove his car after shopping in the northern Sinai town of el Arish.

Father Mina's murder was no surprise to Egypt's Christians because they are frequent targets of attack during times of political instability. Christians have struggled for years—not only to protect their churches, homes and businesses, but also their daughters.

One of the challenges facing Christian families, particularly in Upper Egypt, is the kidnapping of young Christian girls. It generally happens when the girls enter their teen years.

To help avoid this tragedy, some families re-locate to Christian villages. But with that comes a whole new set of challenges.

Manel moved her family from a Muslim village to a Christian one near el Minya because she wanted to protect her oldest

daughter Maryam from abduction and forced conversion. She made the decision after noticing some Muslim girls and boys attempting to lure Maryam away from her family and faith.

“The girls used to tell Maryam, ‘Come with us, we will give you a some money, you are having a hard life.’ The young boys were sending the young girls to do this,” Manel explained. “I feared they would kidnap her and then demand a lot of money to return her, or they would return her and she wouldn’t be in the same way as they took her.”

Now residing as strangers in a new town, Manel’s husband has difficulty finding work.

“I’m much happier now because it is safe for my daughters here, but the working opportunities for my husband are little because few people know my husband,” she said.

Maryam’s family borrowed money to buy food and make their house payment. They prayed God would provide help.

She and her family are not alone. Last year, a Helsinki Commission hearing revealed the number of disappearances and abduction of Christian girls is increasing. Human trafficking expert Michel Clark told of more than 800 cases.

Still, many Islamic leaders and government officials debunk claims that Christian girls are being trafficked. They insist the conversions and marriages are not forced; they are simply the result of amorous love between young people of different faiths.

“A boy and a girl from different religions love each other and thus one of them converts his religion in order to get married,” Helmy al Sayed, Freedom and Justice Party Secretary for Giza, said. The FJP is the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood.

“The problem is that families do not accept that, also the two

religions—neither the church accepts any of its people to Islam because of love, nor Islam accepts this type of conversion,” Sayed said.

Sayed claims it is a social problem that must be addressed, not a religious one.

Earlier this year, Coptic Orthodox Patriarch, Tawadros II told CBN News efforts to prevent trafficking and forced conversions often fail.

“This is very sensitive issue for us ... we try with the government, with the local authorities ... sometimes we are successful, but sometimes no success,” Tawadros said.

The Mohammed Morsi government did little to curtail the trafficking. But the political change gives many Egyptian Christians hope. They pray the next government will force police to treat Christian kidnapping complaints seriously and prosecute the kidnappers.

As for Maryam and her family? Their prayers for help were answered when CBN provided them with the seed money needed to start a small clothing business.

Menal said she and her daughters will “tell people in the church that we sell new clothing and the profits we get will help buy clothes for my children and feed my family.”

She also expressed gratitude to her American brothers and sisters in Christ.

“May the American Christians who helped us have a long life and may God be with them to help others like me to become self-supporting,” she said.

The effort is much needed help from caring American Christians at a time of uncertainty, bringing not only a glimmer of hope, but also a new beginning in Egypt.

Christians are calling Morsi's ouster "a miracle." Why was this second revolution so important to them? CBN News Sr. International Correspondent Gary Lane spoke about this and more on Christian World News July 19.