

Christians Call for Justice Following Church Attack in Egypt

Christians gathered in Cairo on Sunday to protest the destruction of a church that was attacked by Muslim villagers this weekend in Egypt's Fayoum Province. It was the second attack on Christians in the province in a little over a month.

Twenty to 30 Muslims, most from an extended family, attacked Mar Girgis church in Tamiyyah village in Egypt's Fayoum Province following a 3 p.m. service on Friday. The villagers pelted the church and four worshippers with stones, tore down the cross erected on top of the building and threw Molotov cocktail-type explosives at the structure with the intent of setting it on fire, *Morningstar News* reports.

Following the attack, local authorities conducted a "reconciliation" meeting between Christians and Muslims in the village to resolve the dispute, which the church viewed as "unfair and humiliating," according to the Assyrian International News Agency.

About 100 Christian protestors rallied in the Shubra district of Cairo on Sunday demanding that the church be rebuilt and that those responsible be brought to justice. In addition, Christians called for an end to "reconciliation" meetings, a traditional form of "conflict resolution" arranged by Egyptian authorities to ease tensions between Muslims and Christians following anti-Christian violence. The sessions are often held to bypass the judicial system and victims are at times compelled to abandon their claims to a legal remedy.

"Protestors demanded their rights, that the attackers be tried in a civilian court and not pardoned at a 'reconciliation' meeting. No one was held, as usual. It's the same old

story,” Wagih Yacoub, a Coptic human rights activist, told ICC. “If you break the law, you should be punished. It’s that simple. Why should there be double standards between Muslims and Christians? Whenever we’re attacked, we’re told to attend a reconciliation meeting and our rights are taken from us. We demand that the law be applied equally, whether Muslim or Christian.”

The attack on Mar Girgis church was the second assault in the past five weeks against Coptic Christians in Fayoum Province. On Jan. 15, hundreds of Muslims attacked a community center in Fanous village that was being constructed by a Coptic Christian charity, *Morningstar News* reports. The charity was accused by a local Muslim cleric of building a church, despite having legal permits to construct the facility.

Aidan Clay, ICC regional manager for the Middle East, said, “The attack on Mar Girgis church is just one more indication that nothing has changed in the ‘new’ Egypt, which many hoped would bring justice and equality, as perpetrators of anti-Christian violence continue to go unpunished.

“Moreover, the rights of Christians, which are now practically nonexistent in Egypt, are all but taken from them at compulsory ‘reconciliation’ meetings which, by their very nature, are used to excuse those responsible for attacks and shift the blame onto victims. These sessions have contributed to Egypt’s climate of impunity and have only encouraged further assaults.

“We call on Egyptian officials to investigate the attack on Mar Girgis church and arrest those responsible. No one should be withheld the protection granted by law simply because they are a member of a minority religious community.”

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