

Christians in Egypt 'Expecting Death Any Time'

On Aug. 20, 2013 in the small village of Delga, four hours south of Cairo, Egypt, thousands of radical Muslims went on a rampage.

"We were at work when we heard Muslims were burning churches," Boutrous, a Christian living in Delga at the time, said. Boutrous's real name was not given for security purposes.

"Leaders in the mosques were telling Muslims to attack Christians and kill them," he said.

Boutrous and his father Iskander, both Christians, were in their family barber shop when a mob of Muslims attacked them.

"They broke into the shop, took everything and burned the place down," Boutrous said.

Caught on Tape

Boutrous managed to escape, but his father wasn't so fortunate.

"They caught my father and shot him multiple times. Then they dragged his body to the mosque," Boutrous said.

That afternoon, someone with a cell phone recorded a video of Boutrous' father's body, riddled with bullets, being dragged through the streets.

"When they reached the mosque they tied his body to a tractor and dragged him through the village again."

The mob continued to mutilate his father's body while chanting "Allahu Akbar," Arabic for "god is great."

He was buried hours later in a nearby cemetery.

"The next day some people dug up his body and dragged it through the village again. They did this three times that day," Boutrous said.

Boutrous and his family have since escaped from Delga.

"We have no money, no clothes, no job, our home is destroyed, and our business is destroyed," he said.

Expect Death at Any Time

Delga is part of the Minya province, center of the worst violence against Christians in seven centuries.

Anba Macarius is head bishop of Minya's Coptic Church.

"Three hundred homes, 100 businesses, 15 churches and about 10 Christian organizations were destroyed in my province," he said from his parish in Minya Province, home to the largest number of Christians in Egypt.

Macarius said the killing and arson attacks happened because Christians supported the removal of former Islamist President Mohammed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood government.

Since then, more than 100 churches and hundreds of homes and businesses have been destroyed. The government says it will try to rebuild all the places of worship.

But the big question remains: What about those who have lost everything, their livelihood and their homes?

"Christians in Egypt are expecting death at any time," Macarius said.

And he should know. Days before the interview with CBN News, Macarius was the target of an assassination attempt. Driving through a town in Minya province, gunmen began firing at his car.

"I thank the Lord I am still alive but I am like anybody else

in Minya, we all face dangers. My life is not more precious than any other soul in Minya," Macarius said.

Forty-Eight Hours of Death

Christians make up about 10 percent of Egypt's 80 million population. They face daily harassment nearly a year after Morsi's ouster and the government's crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood.

Joseph has had firsthand experience. His identity has been concealed for security reasons. He was abducted late last year by seven gunmen and tortured for two days.

"They put a gun to my head and in my mouth. I started to pray, 'Lord my life is in your hands and I am ready to go when my time is up,' " he said.

"I call them the 48 hours of death. No food, no water, no light, no sleeping. I was blindfolded that entire time and they kept beating me, punching me in the face, on my shoulder and on my back," he said.

The kidnappers routinely target Christians.

"I asked one of the kidnappers, 'Why do you just kidnap Christians?' And he said, 'Christians are weak, they don't retaliate with violence and they have money,' " Joseph said.

The men initially demanded a \$80,000 ransom. After hours of negotiations, they settled on \$43,000.

Still, it was a huge sum that Joseph said his family could not afford to pay. That's when friends from his church stepped in.

"I had some money in savings, but the rest of the ransom money came from church members. I cannot thank them enough for saving my life," Joseph said.

Modern-Day Christian Exodus

Bishop Macarius said the security conditions have led several hundred Christian families to consider leaving Minya, but he encourages them to stay.

“We are telling the church that they must endure the persecution. We must consider it an honor to endure this persecution otherwise it will contradict the level of our commitment to our faith.”

Egypt will hold presidential elections later in May. Joseph is praying Egypt’s Christians will see better days.

“The Muslim Brotherhood’s time in office almost destroyed our country but we are thankful they never had the opportunity to finish their term. Now it will take some time to secure our country,” Joseph said.

Boutros and his family are still hiding in an undisclosed location, but hope to one day go back home to Delga.

“Christians view the current situation as an opportunity to witness about Christ through our suffering,” he said. “We have to be tolerant and keep praying for our enemies.”