

Egypt Court Sentences Muslim to Death Over Copt Attack

A **Muslim** man was sentenced to death in **Egypt** on Monday for killing two people in a dispute with Christians in a southern town, state media said, in a case that underlines sectarian tensions in the country.

Incidents of **Christian-Muslim violence** have increased in Egypt, an overwhelmingly Muslim nation, since the toppling of former President Hosni Mubarak in 2011. His overthrow gave freer rein to hardline **Islamists** repressed under his rule.

President Mohamed Mursi, a **Muslim Brotherhood** politician elected last year, has promised to protect the rights of **Coptic Christians**, who make up about 10 percent of the country's 83 million population.

A court in Upper Egypt found Mahmoud Abdel-Nazir guilty of raiding several **Christian** houses and **killing** two people in November 2011, state news agency MENA said. The agency did not say if those killed were Christian.

Violence had erupted after a Coptic man beat Abdel-Nazir's brother to death with an iron rod in an argument over the use of a village street, MENA said.

Abdel-Nazir and several other people then attacked houses and shops belonging to relatives of the Christian man, killing a farmer and a trader, the agency said. Two people were injured and several buildings were set on fire.

The judge sent the sentence to the Grand Mufti, Egypt's highest religious authority, who needs to confirm death penalties. This is a procedural step that almost always results in confirmation of the sentence.

Since Mubarak was ousted, Christians have complained of several attacks on churches by radical Islamists, incidents

that have sharpened longstanding Christian complaints about being sidelined in the workplace and in law.

As an example, they point to rules that make it harder to obtain official permission to build a church than a mosque.

Sectarian tensions have often flared into violence, particularly in rural areas where rivalries between clans or families sometimes add to friction. Romantic relations between Muslims and Christians are regularly to blame for clashes.

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