

Egyptian Christians Cancel Church Services for First Time in More Than 1,600 Years

Several of Egypt's Coptic Christian churches canceled Mass services last Sunday for the first time in more than 1,600 years amid the unprecedented wave violence against them.

Christian churches in Minya, located in Upper Egypt, canceled their Sunday Mass services after an attack by supporters of ousted Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi last week that destroyed their monastery.

"We did not hold prayers in the monastery on Sunday for the first time in 1,600 years," Selwanes Lotfy, priest of the Virgin Mary and Priest Ibram monastery in Degla, just south of Minya, told Egypt's *al-Masry al-Youm* newspaper.

One of the extremists wrote on the monastery's wall, "Donate [this] to the martyrs' mosque."

Pro-Morsi supporters have accused Coptic Christians of playing a disproportionately large role in the ouster of the former president. Coptic Christian Pope Tawadros II was outspoken in his support of protests against Morsi in the days leading up to Morsi's ouster.

On the pope's Twitter account, he encouraged followers to join the protest movement. Following Morsi's removal, the pope, along with his Muslim counterpart, the grand imam of al-Azhar University, Dr. Ahmed el-Tayyib, appeared together to endorse Egypt's military roadmap for a new government.

Since Aug. 14, when the Egyptian military cleared two pro-Morsi encampments in Cairo, dozens of Christian churches, schools, businesses and homes have been targeted by Islamic

terrorists. At least two Christians have also been killed in the violence. Pope Tawadros is believed to be in hiding.

On Wednesday, the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) called on President Barack Obama to condemn the Muslim Brotherhood's anti-Christian violence.

"We are observing with horror the way this horrifying and murderous Muslim Brotherhood assault on Egyptian Christians has been proceeding for several days with hardly any international reaction," ZOA National President Morton A. Klein said in a statement. "The ZOA strongly condemns these attacks on innocent Christians across Egypt by the radical Muslim Brotherhood mobs."

Coptic Christians constituted a majority of Egypt's population until the Middle Ages, when Islam, introduced by the Arab invasions in the seventh century, eclipsed their religion. Today, Coptic Christianity comprises nearly 10 percent of Egypt's 85 million people, making it the largest single Christian community remaining in the Middle East.

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