

Egyptians Mourn Massacre of Coptic Christians

Funeral services were held on Monday in Cairo for some of the victims of a military attack against a group of Christian protesters that left 26 dead and hundreds wounded.

In the wake of what could be the worst act of violence against Egyptian Christians in modern history, leaders of the Coptic Orthodox Church have called for three days of fasting and prayer for divine intervention, along with three days of mourning.

Leaders from other faith traditions among Egyptian Christians reported similar efforts among their congregations.

Samia Sidhom, managing editor for the Coptic weekly *Al Watani*, said Copts across Egypt are distraught about the attack and the future for Christians across the country.

"At this point you can't even imagine what the future will be like," she said. Speaking specifically about the call for fasting, she added, "At this point, either God does something or you get nothing at all."

The attack started late Sunday afternoon when Christian protesters marching through Cairo began getting pelted with rocks and other projectiles near an overpass that cuts through downtown Cairo. By the time the protesters were able to make it to a television and radio broadcasting building commonly known as the Maspero Building, the army began shooting into the crowd and ramming riot-control vehicles into the protesters.

Witnesses at the scene reportedly said attacks left body parts scattered at the scene. Amateur video at the scene shows two riot-control vehicles plowing into the crowd of protesters.

The protest came in response to a Sept. 30 attack in Upper Egypt, where the Mar Gerges Church building was burned down along with several Christian-owned homes and businesses in Elmarehab village in Aswan.

The church building, which was being renovated, was attacked by local Muslims who claimed the congregation had no right to build it, despite legal documents parish priests put forth to the contrary. The local Muslims claimed the structure was a hospitality house.

Before the attack, parishioners of the church took down crosses outside the building. When it was being destroyed, contractors were removing domes that local Muslims held to be offensive.

The Mar Gerges burning was the third church in Egypt in seven months to be burned down by a mob.

Sidhom said Christian protesters were particularly upset about the church attack because the government blamed them for it, claiming the building was a hospitality house with illegal construction taking place.

Coptic Christians, once a majority in Egypt, now make up 7 to 10 percent of the country's 80 million people.