

Egypt's Christians Criticize Islamist Cabinet

Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi has sworn in a new cabinet, giving leading roles to Islamists and military bureaucrats and only token representation to Christians.

The cabinet appointments came one day after a Muslim mob attacked Christians in a village near Cairo, prompting the entire Christian community to flee their homes. Christians are increasingly worried that the **Muslim Brotherhood** aims to Islamize the country.

Bishop Pachomius, the interim head of the **Coptic Church** who replaced Pope Shenouda following his death in March, called the underrepresentation of Christians "unjust" and refused to congratulate Egypt's Prime Minister Hesham Qandil on the formation of the new cabinet.

"This cabinet is unjust for Copts, especially as we expected higher representation for Copts in the government following the increase of ministerial posts to 35," Pachomious told the independent daily newspaper Al Shorouk.

According to Pachomius, Coptic Christians represent 14 percent of Egypt's 82 million people and should therefore hold four cabinet posts. However, the only Christian appointee was Nadia Eskandar Zukhari as the Minister of Scientific Research, which is viewed as a "semi-ministry" position. Moreover, Zukhari is one of only two women in the new cabinet.

"We're very upset with the formation of the new cabinet," Bishop Augastanious, the head of the Catholic Armenian Church, told Daily News Egypt. "The revolution cabinet should have had much better representation for Copts."

At least three of the key ministries were given to Islamist politicians, including the sensitive post of Education minister, despite Christian concerns that school textbooks teach the Quran and discriminate against minorities. An additional seven positions were handed to bureaucrats from the outgoing military-backed government.

Days after the appointments, a senior bishop warned that attacks against Christians will be on the rise and religious freedom will decline under an Islamist-led government.

"The general climate is turning against Christians," Bishop Morcos told Agence France-Presse. "Assaults on Christians have increased."

Last Wednesday, a Muslim mob burned and looted Christian homes and businesses in the village of Dahshur, south of Cairo. The violence erupted after a Muslim man was killed by a Christian laundry presser who was reportedly defending himself against an armed mob that had gathered outside his home because he had poorly ironed a Muslim's shirt. The village's entire Christian community—as many as 100 families according to some estimates—fled to nearby towns, The Associated Press reported.

Dozens of Christians have been killed and several churches have been destroyed by Islamists since Egypt's uprising overthrew President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011.

Aidan Clay, International Christian Concern Regional Manager for the Middle East, says there is grave concern that Egypt's repressive policies, which have hindered the Christian community's freedom of worship and has failed to prosecute those who incite violence against Christians, will continue to decline under an Islamist-led government, leaving Christians vulnerable and defenseless.

“Under Islamists, Christians have no assurance that they will be protected. Attacks, like what was seen in Dahshur last week, will continue without end and soon the world will see hundreds of thousands of Christians begin fleeing the country for a safe-haven in western countries,” Clay says. “The international community must speak up before it’s too late, demanding that Egypt’s newly-elected government adhere to international human rights standards. The window of opportunity to safeguard Egypt’s religious minority is quickly closing.”