

Muslim Brotherhood Government Terrorizing Egypt's Christians

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood-dominated government has allowed extremists—with Salafists at the forefront—to impose Islamist practices on society, rights activists say. Acts of violence and discrimination on Egypt's streets have escalated in recent weeks in what appears to be an emerging pattern of religious intimidation toward Christians.

Four months after Brotherhood candidate Mohammed Morsi was elected president, assaults on Christians and their places of worship have intensified. Most recently, **Salafists**—who follow the radical Wahhabi doctrine of Islam found in Saudi Arabia—broke into a plot of land in Cairo owned by the **Coptic Church** and built a makeshift mosque on the property.

"A group of Salafists entered land belonging to the diocese [on Nov. 5] ... and stayed till the next day's afternoon prayers. They put up a banner saying 'Abdel Rahman mosque,'" Bishop Morcos told AFP. A church official went on to say that the Salafists threatened to burn Christian shops if the church interfered.

"They claimed that the land is owned by a Muslim, despite the issuance of permits for the service building of the church," said the Maspero Youth Union (MYU). "This episode is part of a series of attacks surrounding the role of Christian worship after the revolution. The Coptic youth feel intense anger and disappointment as a result of the recklessness of the regime in dealing with such incidents and perpetrators."

Egypt's prosecutor general ruled on Thursday that the Coptic Church is the rightful owner of the land and that legal measures be taken to stop Salafis from building a mosque on

the property, AFP reported. Other cases, however, have received less favorable outcomes.

In late October, a Christian concert in the Upper Egypt town of Minya was prevented from taking place after Salafists declared it an **evangelistic** event. Mohamed Talaat, who was among the group of Salafists that denounced the concert, told Reuters that Christian songs should not be broadcasted because, "**Egypt** is Islamic and so we all have to accept Islamic rules to halt any strife."

Similar discriminatory occurrences have become routine in recent months. In Suez, a grocer filed a complaint against Salafists last week for cutting off the tongue of his son for allegedly insulting Islam, Reuters reported. In Kafr el-Sheikh, a town north of Cairo, Christian shopkeeper Victor Younan was warned by Salafists to "give up [the] filthy trade" of selling paintings with a depiction of Jesus. Eight other Christians told Reuters they had received similar warnings.

And in Rafah, a town located near the Gaza and Israeli border, Salafists dropped leaflets on the doorsteps of Christian-owned shops in late September ordering them to leave town within 48 hours or else they would be removed by force. Two days later, masked militants opened fire on one of the shops, AP reported. President Morsi visited Christian families in the area the following week promising that the threats "will not happen again," reported AFP. Hours after Morsi's departure, however, gunmen opened fire on another Christian's home.

Egypt's uprising in early 2011 gave Salafists and other extremist groups unprecedented freedoms that were never thought possible under former dictatorships. Consequently, the number and intensity of attacks against Christians have risen following the political rise of Islamist parties, despite promises made by President Morsi to protect the freedoms of minorities.

“Nothing has been done to reform or achieve equality among Egyptians,” said Youssef Sidhom, the editor of Watani newspaper in Cairo. He went on to dismiss Morsi’s commitment to **religious freedom** as “superficial.”

“There is no doubt that the rate of strange and violent practices by strict Islamists has increased tremendously since the election of Morsi,” Gamal Eid, the founder of The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, told Reuters. “We have in a few months seen many more of such incidents than we have seen in years before Morsi.”

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