

# Christians in Egypt attacked by civilians twice in one week

By Marlo Safi

National Review (12.06.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2Iblrvq> – While attacks on Christians in Egypt such as bombings of churches by Islamists break into our news cycles in the U.S., smaller attacks often go without making much of an impression in our media. Large-scale attacks, such as the Palm Sunday church bombings of 2017 where 44 people were killed, aren't as frequent as the attacks on Egypt's Coptic community by regular Egyptians. Copts – Christians in Egypt that trace their ancestry back to the ancient Egyptians and their faith to St. Mark the Apostle – have faced violent transgression by fellow civilians toward their homes in the last week alone.

Last week in a town called Samalot in the Egyptian province of Minya, a Coptic Christian woman who had converted to Islam returned to her parent's village as part of a celebration of her conversion. The mob of Egyptians turned violent, throwing rocks at Coptic homes while yelling obscenities at them. Cars and other property were destroyed. Police arrested eight Copts in an effort to end the violence – less than one week later, similar discriminatory actions by police following violence from civilians toward Copts occurred again.

On Monday, in the village of Ishnien Al Nasara in Minya, three Coptic homes were destroyed following rumors that a Copt had

“insulted religion” on Facebook, despite Copts refuting the accusation that the young Coptic man alleged to have broken blasphemy laws had written anything abusive. According to a partner of U.S.-based Coptic advocacy group Coptic Voice, police arrested the individual that wrote the post for being in violation of blasphemy laws. The perpetrators who burned the homes, however, were not arrested.

This is the reality for Copts in Egypt today – they face not only the threat from terror groups such as ISIS, but also daily harassment or assault from fellow Egyptians, who view Christians as unclean and heretic, and who often spread false rumors. Sara Salama, president of Coptic Voice, tells National Review that these recent incidents are nothing new, and that Egyptian president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who has improved the public rhetoric about Christians in the country by encouraging peaceful coexistence, must take more action on the ground to provoke positive change.

For example, in early June President Sisi delivered a speech to Muslim Egyptians during Ramadan in which he encouraged them to be “understanding” of Christians in Egypt, and congratulate them on the opening of their churches.

When we wish our Christian brothers a happy feast or [congratulate them] on building new churches, we represent our religion,” he said, noting that such gestures are not meant to show off. “There is a big difference between practicing and understanding the religion,” he added.

Salama remarks on the improvement of rhetoric, but is

skeptical of its effects. "While the upgrade in public rhetoric on religious tolerance coming out of Egypt's presidential office is important in and of itself, it has not lead to a positive change in the situation on the ground," Salama says. "The main issue here is that of accountability." She notes that police often act more as bystanders than individuals tasked with protecting Egyptian citizens, especially Copts.

In Defense of Christians, a non-profit and non-partisan human-rights and advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C. that advocates for the rights of Christians and other minorities in the Middle East, tells National Review that Egyptian police "should be protecting everyone against criminal acts" but instead "arrested the victims in an evil and twisted form of justice."

"IDC demands that President Sisi back his noble words about the equality of all Egyptians with actions to reform Minya province. Such incidents against a vulnerable religious minority should not be tolerated anywhere in the world, especially not in an ally country of the United States."