

Notice: Undefined index: et_header_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1214

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Notice: Undefined index: et_header_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1215

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Notice: Undefined index: et_template in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1216

EGYPT: 70 church buildings legalised, church and mosque demolished

Egyptian authorities legalised 70 church buildings for worship purposes on Tuesday 19 May

CSW (21.05.2020) – <https://bit.ly/2XBdZ3k> – The decision was issued following a meeting of the Government Committee that oversees the legalisation of churches, which was chaired by the Prime Minister. This decision brings the total number of churches that have been legalised since the committee

commenced its mandate in 2016 to 1638.

The legalisation of church buildings remains a controversial issue. Local authorities demolished a church building in Koum Al-Farag, Al-Behera governorate, on Wednesday 20 May following sectarian protests. The one-storey building had been used for worship purposes for 15 years. A few years ago local Muslims constructed a mosque next to the building, hoping to prevent it from being legalised as a church. According to an ancient Islamic tradition (or common law), churches are prevented from being formally recognised or displaying any Christian symbols if a mosque is built next to them.

Recently, two additional floors had been constructed in order to accommodate the growing congregation, which sparked sectarian tension. To prevent further escalation, local authorities demolished both the church building and the mosque that was built next to it. 14 Christians, including the local priest and 4 women, were arrested when they tried to stop the authorities from demolishing the building.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said: "CSW welcomes the legalisation of more churches in Egypt, and we encourage the administration to continue on the path of reforming legislation and addressing societal attitudes and practices that restrict the right to freedom of religion or belief. While the legalisation of these places of worship is a welcome development, we remain concerned by the destruction of both the church and mosque in Koum Al-Farag, which is not an effective way of addressing sectarian tensions. The government must work with local authorities to formulate civic interventions that address and transform the societal attitudes underpinning sectarian tensions."

Although there have been noticeable improvements in the treatment of the Christian community during President Sisi's time in office, sectarian incidents continue to occur in certain localities, including the kidnap and forced conversion of Christian women. Such incidents are usually resolved through extra-legal community reconciliation sessions, which are often characterised by bias and unbalanced rulings that deprive victims, primarily Christians, of justice. CSW continues to call for those responsible for such incidents to be held to account through the legal system.

On 1 May the Coptic Orthodox Parish of Al-Manofyia withdrew from a civil society initiative to contain and resolve sectarian incidents via inter-community dialogue. The Egyptian Family House, a joint initiative that was created in 2011 by the Coptic Orthodox Church and Al-Azhar, aims to strengthen religious harmony and create grassroots solutions to sectarian tensions.

The parish issued a statement in which it condemned the lack of action on the part of the Egyptian Family House in the case of the abduction of Rania Abdul-Masseih Halim, a Christian woman who disappeared on 22 April and subsequently reappeared in a video in which she claims to have converted to Islam and no longer wanted anyone to search for her. Her family believes these claims were made under duress.

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