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## **Extremists attack church building site and Christian homes and properties**

***An extremist mob attacked a church building site and Christian homes and properties in Al-Azeeb village in Samalout, Minya Province, Upper Egypt on the evening of 18 December.***

[CSW](#) (20.12.2023) - An estimated 3,000 Coptic Christians live in Al-Azeeb, and the community recently received a permit from the government to build a church as they did not have one and had to commute to churches elsewhere to worship.

Extremist members of the Muslim community from Al-Azeeb and nearby villages attacked the site as workers were digging the ground to lay foundations. The attackers clashed with police, who were deployed quickly to contain the situation, and threw stones and Molotov cocktails which set fire to several houses and livestock belonging to Christians.

A local source said that Christians in the village are now fearful to go outside. Local police and security forces are continuing to search for the perpetrators.

CSW's Founder President Mervyn Thomas said: ***'CSW is saddened by this latest attack in a region that has long been prone to sectarian outbreaks. Our thoughts and prayers are very much with those affected and with the Christian community in Egypt in general as Christmas approaches. The torching of Coptic homes and properties highlights once again the urgent need for the Egyptian authorities to enact the law regulating the construction and renovation of houses of worship in a manner that guarantees the right of Christians to worship in community with others. We call on the Egyptian authorities to hold those responsible for this attack accountable, and to refrain from resorting to reconciliation meetings as a replacement for the rule of law, as they impose ad-hoc, unjust and often unconstitutional conditions on the victims of sectarian violence and perpetuate impunity for the perpetrators.'***

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## **Jewish community in Cairo celebrates Rosh Hashanah for the first time in 70 years**

[CSW](#) (19.09.2023) - The Jewish community in Cairo, Egypt, was able to [celebrate](#) Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, for the first time in 70 years on Friday 15 September.

The celebration was held at the Heliopolis Synagogue in Cairo, and comes after a number of positive initiatives taken by the Egyptian government towards the Jewish community.

In August 2022, the Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly opened one of the oldest Jewish Synagogues in Egypt after it had been renovated. Abraham Bin Azra synagogue was built in the 12th century and was renovated for the first time in the 19th century.

In 2018, the Egyptian government, at the instruction of President Sisi, pledged 1.25 billion Egyptian Pounds towards renovating and preserving Jewish religious and cultural sites in the country.

CSW's Founder President Mervyn Thomas said: 'CSW welcomes news that the Jewish community was able to celebrate the New Year in Cairo, and we are encouraged at the positive steps Egypt has taken in recent years in improving the situation for Jewish and Christian communities in the country. We continue to call on the Egyptian government to advance freedom of religion or belief and equality before the law even further, by extending the constitutional rights enjoyed by Abrahamic religions to religious communities that are currently unrecognised, and to reform the education system by removing material insulting to non-Muslims from the existing curriculum.'



*Caption: Rosh Hashanah celebrations at the Heliopolis Synagogue in Cairo.*

*Credit: [Facebook/JCC Cairo](#)*

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## **Egypt divided over recent niqab ban at schools**

***Egyptians talk to Al Jazeera about the recent government decision to prohibit students from wearing niqab.***

By Umut Uras

[Aljazeera](#) (12.09.2023) - The Egyptian government has banned female students from wearing the niqab, a face-covering veil, at schools, according to state-owned media.

Education Minister Reda Hegazy's statement, released on Monday and quoted by the government-owned Ahram newspaper, said students have an "optional" right to choose if they will cover their hair at school. The statement, however, added that the hair covering cannot cover their face.

"Any form of hair covering that contravenes the condition of the face being visible is not acceptable and the hair covering should be in the colour chosen by the ministry and local education directorate," it added.

The decision will be enforced starting from the academic year on September 30 and continue until June 8, 2024.

Egyptians, speaking to Al Jazeera on the condition of anonymity, expressed mixed opinions over the ban.

M A, a 33-year-old marketing manager from Alexandria, said he is against the niqab being worn at schools because it obscures what should be a "transparent" educational process.

"Anything that obscures teachers from properly reading the student's body language and facial expression to be able to help them or show necessary attention should not be allowed at schools," he said.

M M, who also agreed with the government's ban, said the implementation of this decision is necessary from a security perspective.

"School authorities should be able to identify people going in and out of schools," the 38-year-old architect, who is also from Alexandria, said.

He said niqab-wearing students are largely alienated in schools, be they mixed or segregated ones.

On the other hand, he believes the ban might lead some parents to transfer their children from mixed schools to female-only ones.

According to the ministerial statement, a student should make the decision to cover her hair "based on her own personal desire without any pressure or force from any person or any other entity other than the parents", in an apparent reference to local religious groups and movements.

The statement said parents should be informed of their daughter's choice and added that authorities will verify the guardians' knowledge of the student's choice over the issue.

### **'Females always pull short straw'**

Writer F A, 45, from Cairo, thinks the government's decision is the latest case of how women are used as "punching bags ... socially, politically and economically".

“Doesn’t matter under what pretext, or none ... females always pull the short straw,” she said.

“A story as old as time and one that continues to be written and many applaud/decry it depending on which lens they have slapped on to see the world.”

She said: “With France banning the abaya and the burkini, Egypt following suit with the niqab ban and before that the US Supreme Court overturning Roe v Wade and the Taliban continuing to severely constrain and constrict females from basically living – the policing of women’s bodies continues.”

I A, a 33-year-old civil engineer, also expressed support for women wearing niqab at schools “as it is part of everyone’s freedom”.

“Egypt is a Muslim country,” he told Al Jazeera, adding that he believed it would be difficult to erase the country’s identity with such a decision.

The government took this decision “to enhance security in all the fields, which I find to be against human rights”, I A said.

The hijab, which covers women’s hair but not the face is widely worn in Egypt, while the niqab is worn more by people from ultraconservative backgrounds.

There have been fierce discussions in Egyptian society over wearing niqab in public spaces and educational institutions for a long time.

Various educational institutions in the country autonomously impose bans on niqabs.

In 2015, Cairo University introduced a niqab ban for its staff, which was upheld in later years by the Egyptian judiciary in 2016 and 2020 despite appeals.

Niqab ban proposals introduced in the Egyptian parliament in recent years were either withdrawn or rejected.