

# EGYPT

The number of major bomb attacks on churches in Egypt has fallen compared to the previous two years when explosions struck at the heart of the Coptic Christian community, killing and maiming Mass-goers at the country's most important cathedrals in Cairo and Alexandria.<sup>1</sup> That said, several egregious attacks did take place, including the November 2018 attack on a bus carrying Christian pilgrims.<sup>2</sup> The decline in violent acts suggested progress was being made due to President al-Sisi's stated determination to deal with Daesh (ISIS), which claimed responsibility for many of the attacks. In January 2019, a bomb plot was foiled when Imam Saad Askar reacted promptly to mosque-goers' reports of suspicious activity near the Virgin Mary and Abu Seifin Church, Nasr City.<sup>3</sup> More than a week earlier, a police officer was killed defusing a bomb near a church in another of Cairo's suburbs.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, protests against the construction of the Church buildings continues to occur – a problem which has apparently worsened since the government made it easier to secure legal approval for church buildings.<sup>5</sup> Coptic Christian women and girls continue to be abducted for forced conversion and marriage.



## DECEMBER 2017

Nine people were confirmed dead when at least two gunmen attacked Mar Mina Coptic church in the Helwan district, south of Cairo. Those killed included members of the congregation and a police officer involved in a shootout. A number of others were injured, many of them guards protecting the church. Government security said one of the terrorists "was going to blow himself up using a suicide belt." Afterwards, explosives experts dismantled two improvised explosive devices near the church.<sup>6</sup>

## NOVEMBER 2018

Seven people were killed and 19 were wounded when Muslim extremists ambushed three buses carrying Christian pilgrims going to a remote monastery south of Cairo. According to the Coptic Orthodox Church, all but one of those killed were members of the same family. Among the dead were a boy aged 15 and a 12-year-old girl. Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack, which it said was revenge against the Egyptian authorities for jailing "our chaste sisters."<sup>7</sup>

## JANUARY 2019

Police closed down the only church in Manshiyet Zaafarana village, Minya, leaving 1,000 Copts without a place of worship. Muslim residents surrounded the building and demanded that it be shut, using what the Archdiocese of Minya described as "offensive and inflammatory" language. Reportedly, police were conciliatory to protestors and closed the building. The church building had been stormed a few days earlier on January 7, 2019, just hours after Christmas Mass. Police ejected the protestors.<sup>8</sup>

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8. "Minya Manshiyet Zaafarana Copts Attacked, Church Closed," *Coptic Solidarity*, January 13, 2019, <https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2019/01/13/minya-manshiyet-zaafarana-copts-attacked-church-closed/>; Hadeer El-Mahdawy, "Coptic Christian place of worship shuttered in Minya after Muslim residents protest," *Mada*, January 16, 2019, <https://madamas.com/en/2019/01/16/news/u/coptic-christian-place-of-worship-shuttered-in-minya-village-after-protests-by-muslim-residents/> (accessed June 27, 2019).